

Accessing the Learning Lifeworld: Transformative Student Learning
Experiences in Regional Academic Travel at New York University Abu Dhabi

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Abstract

**Accessing the Learning Lifeworld:
Transformative Student Learning Experiences in
Regional Academic Travel at New York University Abu Dhabi**

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This thesis investigates the learning experiences of students who participated in short-term study abroad trips (also known as regional academic travel) offered by New York University Abu Dhabi's Office of Global Education, with the objective of attaining an authentic account of these experiences. This authentic account supports a better understanding of a student's experience, and leads to a more in-depth understanding of learning, which for this research is called the learning lifeworld. Phenomenography is used to capture the qualitative variation of individual experiences leading to four categories of description placed in logical relationship to one another yielding an outcome space of four conceptions of learning experience. Phenomenography alone, while reflective in nature, has limitations on determining an authentic account of experience.

Therefore, it is helpful to draw upon reflective thinking ability, which produces information on each student's ability to reason through an ill-structured problem, and puts students in a reflective thinking development stage, which is linked to a student's critical reflection ability. Reflective judgment stages for each student were determined using the standard reflective judgment interview (King & Kitchener, 1994), and then compared against the instances conceptions of learning experience that appeared in each student account. A relationship was identified between instances of conceptions and the level of a student's reflective thinking ability that could lead to a deeper understanding of the learning lifeworld through the language students used in responses from the phenomenographic interview and the reflective judgment interview.

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The findings of this research show that there were at least four qualitatively different ways students experienced regional academic travel trips. The categories developed through an analysis of student reflective accounts are: the regional academic travel experience *complements and supplements classroom learning; develops academic skills; affects students' future academic, personal, and professional endeavours; and offers students a chance to reflect on impacts they have made and can make in a community and the world.* The results of this research make an original contribution to lifeworld theory, transformative learning, and short-term study abroad research by utilizing a unique combination of research approaches (phenomenography and reflective judgment to inform lifeworld theory and transformative learning) in a novel setting (NYU Abu Dhabi regional academic travel). The design of this research could be used for future studies to examine learning in an in-depth way, whilst assuring that the accounts given could be considered authentic. Finally, the results also led to recommendations for improvement of future regional academic travel trips offered by The Office of Global Education.

Keywords: learning lifeworld, phenomenography, reflective judgment, transformative learning, regional academic travel, short-term study abroad

Statement of Original Authorship

The work contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted to meet requirements for any other award or credit at this or any institution of higher education. To the best of my knowledge, the thesis is wholly original and all material or writing published or written by others and contained herein has been duly referenced and credited.

Signature: JSB

Date: 20 October 2015

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Chapter 1 – Introduction to the Research

This chapter introduces the context, key concepts, and organization of this thesis. This first chapter is divided into six sections. The first section sets the context for the research. Second, the research problem, along with the key research questions, are introduced to begin establish the framework for the rest of the thesis. The third section discusses researcher positioning, followed by the fourth section establishing the research approach chosen and the rationale for this research approach. The fifth section presents key concepts central to the framework of this thesis. Finally, the last section of this chapter presents an overview of the organization of this thesis.

1.1 The Context of This Research

This research investigated student learning experiences during participation in a short-term study abroad (STSA) program offered by New York University Abu Dhabi (NYU Abu Dhabi or NYUAD) through its Office of Global Education. These STSA programs developed by the Office of Global Education – which are called regional academic travel trips – take place over the week of spring break, and offer students “first-hand experiences of the societies and issues they are studying at NYUAD” (New York University Abu Dhabi, n.d.). These experiences intensify student learning through an experiential dimension not achieved by reading alone (*Ibid.*). Paige et al. (2010), in researching study abroad experiences across nearly 50 years, found that study abroad was among the most influential and impactful experiences of students’ academic career, and of their lives (p. 1).

This research took shape during a conversation in January 2014 with NYUAD’s Associate Vice Chancellor for Global Education. She had expressed an interest in research being done on Global Education programs at NYUAD. Based on our shared interests, we agreed that I could focus my thesis project on student learning experiences in regional academic travel trips. I indicated to her that the application of a phenomenographic research approach could yield some in-depth insights into the student experience by examining the qualitative variations in the ways of experiencing these regional academic travel trips, and could also offer recommendations for future

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regional academic travel. During the same conversation, she and I discussed the reflective judgment model, and she loaned me a copy of the King & Kitchener (1994) book on the subject. This gave way to the idea that phenomenography and reflective judgment could work together to better understand student learning experiences.

The concept of learning lifeworld came about from reading through phenomenographic research. I came across an article by Ashworth & Lucas (2000), which offered a practical guide to phenomenographic research, and discussed their research approach in the context of the student lifeworld, arguing that a focus on lifeworld theory would advance phenomenographic research with “a more rigorous consideration of how to engage with the student’s lived experience” (p. 295). This perceived lack of rigor in phenomenography opened up the possibility that a research approach comprising phenomenography, reflective judgment, and lifeworld theory could lead to a better understanding of the student experience.

NYUAD’s Office of Global Education has sought to augment student classroom learning through regional academic travel trips to destinations such as Sri Lanka, Nepal, Cyprus, India, Ethiopia, and other destinations near the United Arab Emirates. Two of these trips, Engineers for Social Impact (EfSI) (a regional trip to Sri Lanka working with Habitat for Humanity to help build houses for local villagers) and public health (a regional trip to Ethiopia interviewing and observing patients with Leprosy, clubfoot, and HIV/AIDS, and working at a social centre to understand how they provide services to the local community), were recommended as the objects of study because these two programs were developed directly by Global Education, offering full access to program information to use for this research.

The Engineers for Social Impact (or EfSI) trip was designed by the Office of Global Education in consultation with faculty leaders in NYUAD’s Engineering division. The purpose of the March 2014 weeklong field lab dubbed “engineers as ethnographers” involved working with Habitat for Humanity building houses for residents in the village of Godadenigamakanda, Sri Lanka. Students attended pre-departure information sessions, where the structure of the program and key travel information were discussed. Whilst in Sri Lanka, teams of engineering students were formed, with each team

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focused on an issue important to the village. During the day, one member from each issue team would join a work team to help build houses. During the evening, students would re-join their issue teams to discuss what each of them learned about their issue during the day to help with a final oral presentation to be given in Sri Lanka at the end of the week. The only other required assignment was a written team report to be submitted approximately one week after returning to Abu Dhabi from Sri Lanka. There were no other required assignments (New York University Abu Dhabi Office of Global Education, 2014a).

The public health program was designed, like EfSI, by The Office of Global Education, in consultation with a visiting NYUAD public health faculty member, and the head of NYUAD's Health and Wellness Centre. This program had two parts: a February 2014 two-day trip to a hospital in Al Ain, United Arab Emirates, and a March 2014 weeklong trip to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. My research focused only on the Ethiopia portion of the public health trip in order to examine student experience from the trip that was most similar to the EfSI experience. Students were required to attend a public health lecture in November 2014, followed by a pre-departure information session to learn about travel information and other details about the experience. Once in Addis Ababa, students visited three locations: the ALERT hospital specialising in the treatment of leprosy, the CURE hospital specialising in clubfoot (foot deformity), and the Medhen Social Centre focused on helping people with HIV/AIDS get access to social services such as housing and healthcare. Students spent the majority of their time at Medhen, and would meet with clients to gather narratives in order to generate marketing information for Medhen to be able to share with prospective donors. Students worked in teams and were assigned to different departments of a social centre to gather information and help with their communication to funding agencies and individual donors. The only required assignment for the Ethiopia trip was a team presentation given in Ethiopia at the end of the week. There were no other required assignments (New York University Abu Dhabi Office of Global Education, 2014b).

1.2 The Research Problem and Key Research Questions

NYUAD's Office of Global Education has not benefitted from any research into the impact on student learning of its programs. If the goal of Global Education is to augment learning, how can the office know if learning has been achieved? The Office has limited resources to run and monitor the quality of the execution of their programs. There are little to no resources available for researching outcomes of the trips they offer. Given the congruence between regional academic travel and short-term study abroad trips, the Office could review current STSA research and utilize some of the recommendations presented in the literature, but it is unclear if these recommendations could apply to the unique context of NYUAD. This could create a system of trial and error in which tools from other STSA programs are tried in the field. However, it would be much more effective to study regional academic travel at NYUAD itself, especially given the plethora of approaches, outcomes, and findings in current STSA research.

Research on STSA was an understudied subset of study abroad research as recently as 10 years ago. A simple search on the term "short-term study abroad" in the University of Liverpool Electronic Library showed that nearly ninety per cent of research published on the subject has only been published in the past ten years. During the past decade, however, there have been hundreds of articles on STSA programs. These studies have involved large-scale surveys, case studies, and combinations of questionnaires and open-ended questions. Earlier studies such as those done by Medina Lopez Portillo (2004) and Chieffo & Griffiths (2004) measured quality of STSA programs based on duration. However, more recent research conducted by Antonakopoulou (2013) refuted the assertion that shorter duration equalled a lower impact of experience, perhaps suggesting that transformative learning during STSA programs was less likely because of duration. Factors other than duration, such as program structure, needed to be considered as a way to understand learning experiences during the EfSI and public health trips.

The context of the study, namely an attempt to better understand students' learning experiences during their participation in regional academic travel trips at NYU Abu Dhabi's Office of Global Education, and from the gaps

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in the literature, led to the establishment of this research project, and the creation of the following key research questions to be investigated:

- What are the qualitatively different ways students experience particular regional academic travel trips at NYU Abu Dhabi?
- How can these qualitatively different ways – manifested as conceptions of learning experiences – be used in conjunction with an assessment of reflective thinking ability to yield deeper insight into the learning lifeworld?
- How can understanding of the learning lifeworld inform the transformative learning potential of particular regional academic travel experiences at NYU Abu Dhabi, and be used to inform and improve future regional academic travel offered by NYUAD's Office of Global Education?

Responding to the above questions could lead to insights into understanding student learning experiences in regional academic travel, yielding better access to the learning lifeworld, and the transformative learning potential of these regional academic travel trips. The results of this research could help NYUAD's Office of Global Education more effectively structure future regional academic travel trips, leading to a richer learning experience for future participants.

1.3 Researcher Positioning

The position a researcher takes in a study is key to understanding and interpreting outcomes. Cousin (2010) emphasized researcher reflexivity by bringing the researcher's biography explicitly into the research process, especially qualitative research studies. Scholars in phenomenographic research have addressed positioning in a number of different ways. For example, Marton (1994) addressed position in phenomenographic research by putting the responsibility of researcher to bracket their own preconceived ideas, and focus on interpreting the research based on how participants view the phenomenon (p. 4428). Following on Marton's assertions, Ashworth and Lucas (2000) stressed the importance of the researcher bracketing

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presuppositions in phenomenographic research, especially in exploring the lifeworld of students. These presuppositions to be bracketed include: importing earlier research findings, assuming pre-given structures or interpretations, assuming specific research techniques and assumptions built into those techniques, and the researcher attempting to uncover some kind of cause of experience. Researcher experience, not research expectations, should be declared (*Ibid.*, p. 298).

During conversations with NYUAD's Office of Global Education, different types of research were discussed that could be done on various programs offered by Global Education. My goal of researching variation in particular experiences (regional academic travel) led to my recommendation of keeping the sample size contained in order to delve more deeply into individual experience, on which we agreed. Global Education suggested examining student learning experiences in EfSI and public health regional academic travel trips. As a colleague, I wanted to support the head's enthusiasm for doing worthwhile research in her area, whilst also framing an achievable research project.

My position is also important in relation to the approach chosen for this research, which may reflect assumptions, biases, and experience I may bring to the research process. The broadest assumption I likely bring to this research is my love of travel and geography. I have visited over 40 countries across North America, Europe, Asia, Africa, and Australia, and my personal belief is that travel transforms a person, as it has done with me. Additionally, I always loved studying maps and looking at maps as possible pathways to adventure. When I was younger, I was fascinated with the possibilities of exploring new countries and learning about new cultures. My first overseas travel experience was a trip to China with my choir when I was 27, nearly 15 years ago. Since then, I have always looked forward to when I could travel to visit new places, or to revisit places I have already been to see it in a different way. This personal interest is a presupposition I needed to bracket before proceeding with this research, and I had to be cognizant of this during the formulation of the study to ensure that I took Marton's (1994) advice to bracket my own preconceived ideas and remain open to perspectives of

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students as the guide for developing interview questions, analysing data, and developing conclusions on the data.

Another declaration important for this study is my history as a student. I have a Bachelor of Arts and a Master of Arts degree from New York University. Although I never participated in any study abroad trip during my studies in New York (mostly because I could not afford the cost), I have a great appreciation for those who had the opportunity to do so. My experience as a student at NYU could translate to empathy for interviewees, but it could also create a challenge if I did not bracket wishes and expectations from my own learning experience.

The above personal and professional declarations are an important part of this research. These reasons represent the key drivers behind my interest in studying this research. The possibility of learning about the motivations behind my own interest compelled me to undertake this research, and I hoped this research would produce insights into how different people have been affected by certain types of academic travel.

1.4 Overview of Research Approach

This research used a phenomenographic methodology combined with the reflective judgment model (King & Kitchener, 1994) to attempt to access the student learning lifeworld. The phenomenographic methodology is rooted in the interpretive qualitative research paradigm, described as a combination of discovering and understanding a phenomenon, a process, perspective, and worldviews of people, where analysis is done inductively to seek patterns and themes across the data (Merriam, 2002). Marton (1986) described phenomenography, a type of interpretive qualitative research, as “a research method adapted for mapping the qualitatively different ways in which people experience, conceptualise, perceive, and understand various aspects of, and phenomena in, the world around them” (p. 31). Students were asked questions related to their experience during either the EfSI trip or the public health trip, followed by questions related to the presentation of an ill-structured problem to qualitatively assess their reflective thinking ability. The reflective judgement interview would help produce information on student’s reflective thinking ability, which would also determine their capacity to be

critically reflective. Experiential variation was captured through the phenomenographic analysis of data leading to the establishment of themes from individual profiles, categories of description from groups of themes, and finally an outcome space that placed these categories of description in logical relationship to one another, yielding conceptions of learning experiences. Reflective thinking ability was assessed through scoring interview responses to a standard set of questions against the reflective judgment model to determine individual student reflective thinking stage. Reflective thinking stage placement was then compared with conceptions of learning experiences to determine if there is notable connection between the two that could help lead to a better understanding of a student's learning lifeworld. Additionally, the possibility of transformative learning – using Transformative Learning Theory (Mezirow, 2000) as the guiding theory – during the regional academic travel trip was also discussed based on the results of the research.

The objects of this research – the EfSI trip and the public health trip – touch upon three areas of inquiry: short-term study abroad, transformative learning, and lifeworld theory. These three areas are the focus of the literature review that takes place in the next chapter.

1.5 Key Concepts in This Research

This research has used certain terms and concepts that may have different connotations outside of this research. Therefore, this section seeks to briefly explain and define certain recurring concepts in the context of this research to help the reader better understand further discussions in this thesis.

1.5.1 Regional Academic Travel

The term *regional academic travel* refers to a specific type of short-term study abroad program developed by New York University Abu Dhabi's Office of Global Education. These programs, ranging in duration from one day to a few weeks over the January term, offer students the opportunity to learn outside the classroom at a domestic (UAE) or regional location (i.e. Middle East, South Asia, North Africa, East Africa) from the Abu Dhabi campus. Regional academic travel "creates exceptional opportunities for students to

combine experiential study, research, and intercultural exploration” (New York University Abu Dhabi, “Regional Academic Travel”, n.d.).

For this research, regional academic travel specifically refers to the two trips chosen for this study: the Engineers for Social Impact (EfSI) March 2014 trip to Sri Lanka, and the public health trip to Ethiopia in March 2014.

Throughout this thesis, regional academic travel refers to these two experiences, but will be contextualized to mean the more general category of all regional academic travel experiences at NYUAD where appropriate.

1.5.2 Learning Experience

This research is interested in improving our understanding of students’ learning experiences. For the purposes of this research, the terms *learning* and *experience* are contextualized through the lens of phenomenography. The term *learning* is defined for the purposes of this research as “a change in the way the learner experiences the world, which means that the relevance of the task has to be seen to transcend the task in itself and have some personal meaning for the learner” (Booth, 1997, p. 137). The phenomenographic meaning of *experience* is defined for this research as a way of conceptualizing any aspect of the world (Marton, 1981, p. 188). Therefore, this study defines *learning experience* as a change in the way a learner conceptualizes any aspect of the world that transcends the aspect itself to have personal meaning to the learner. This means learning experiences can cover a wide range and allows learners to be participants in defining and determining their own learning experiences.

1.5.3 Authenticity

This research explored ways to enter the learning lifeworld through a qualitative measurement of students’ reflective thinking ability as related to conceptions of learning experiences. Mezirow (1998) connected critical reflection to higher levels of reflective thinking, specifically using King & Kitchener’s (1994) reflective judgment model. Reflective thinking ability for this study is used to determine the *authenticity* of the account given by students during the interview, determining if students have the reflective thinking ability, and therefore the critical reflection abilities, to give an account that could be

considered *authentic*. A central area of exploration of my research is how results of phenomenographic research can be determined to be more authentic by determining a student's reflective thinking ability. In other words, my research investigates whether higher reflective thinking increases the likelihood of a more authentic account of experience given by the student, thereby gaining access to a student's learning lifeworld.

Jarvis (1992) linked authenticity to reflective learning stating that people need to develop autonomously and rationally as individuals within a social context, which best connects to lifeworld theory, a major pillar of this study. Furthermore, Heidegger (1962, as cited in Cranton & Roy, 2003) argued for critical participation, which means we need to know who we are and what we believe and then act on that. The establishment of authenticity as a communicative act supports the framework of this research by connecting Heidegger's critical participation with Habermas' (1984, 1987) theory of communicative action.

1.5.4 Learning Lifeworld

An earlier section defined learning as a change in the way a person experiences the world that has personal meaning for them. A choice was made to rely on Habermas' version of lifeworld as communicative action. One of the primary vehicles for learning is language, which supports the connection between learning and (Habermas') lifeworld theory. Ashworth & Lucas (1998) posited that in order for phenomenography to truly achieve an understanding of student conceptions – thereby entering a student's lifeworld – prior assumptions about what is being studied must be set aside, which they term *bracketing* (p. 418). Learning and lifeworld combined and defined in the context of this research as a change in the way a learner experiences the world in relation to how the learner uses language to understand their place in society (norms), in culture (traditions), and in their own personal experience, and could serve as contributing factors that help to access the learning lifeworld.

1.6 Overview of Thesis

The remainder of this thesis is comprised of four further chapters. The second chapter reviews literature in the three broad areas of inquiry that contextualize this research – short-term study abroad, transformative learning, and lifeworld theory – and identifies the research gap addressed by this study. The third chapter details the research methodology used for this study, including methodological considerations of validity, reliability, and ethics. The fourth chapter presents the findings of this research, including the conceptions developed, the scoring results of the reflective judgment interview, culminating with a section connecting conceptions to reflective thinking stage to determine if there is a connection between the two. Finally, the fifth chapter discusses the results of the research in relation to the literature, offering practical implications for the Office of Global Education, significance and limitations of this research and recommendations for future research based on the research findings of this study.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

This chapter begins with a review of literature related to study abroad, which broadly informs this research project. The general area of study abroad is then narrowed to the subset field of short-term study abroad (STSA). STSA literature is broken down into a focus on certain themes including intercultural development, cognitive learning, reflective awareness, and transformation, which are key themes of STSA that are pertinent to this research. The review will then look at the literature on transformational learning theory, with a specific focus on critical self-reflection, which serves as an entry point for a review of literature on the lifeworld, with an emphasis on how lifeworld theory is applicable to this research. The foundational concept of *lifeworld* by Edmund Husserl (1936, as cited in Gross, 2010), defined in section 2.4.1, guides the review of the literature on lifeworld leading to a key distinction between Husserl's lifeworld concept as an individual, inward endeavour, and Habermas' (1984, 1987) concept of lifeworld as a communicative exercise, which relies on intersubjectivity and the establishment of a collective identity. STSA's focus on intersubjectivity and the collective lifeworld will close out this chapter and serve to illuminate the research questions and justify the methodological choices presented in Chapter 3.

2.1 Research on Study Abroad

2.1.1 Overview of Study Abroad

Literature on study abroad contains different key themes such as intercultural development, learning outcomes, and transformational learning that informs this research. According to the Institute of International Education (IIE) (2014) *Open Doors* report on international educational exchange, which includes data on U.S. student study abroad data, the number of U.S. study abroad students had doubled between 1998 and 2013. Additionally, over 46,000 students go abroad for their entire degree. These numbers may not include American universities overseas such as NYU Abu Dhabi, but IIE's data show that students looking past their home country borders to explore academic programs are increasing in number. These explorations have shown some tangible results. Stone and Petrick (2013) looked at the literature

related to study abroad and the benefits of travel. Many of the qualitative studies reviewed had some notable student participant outcomes such as cross-cultural competence, cognitive learning, and knowledge and skills building, among other attributes (p. 733-734). Paige and Fry (2010) conducted a longitudinal study spanning 50 years on study abroad and global engagement (known as the SAGE project) comprised of a survey to former study abroad students (n=6,378) and non-study abroad students (n=5,924) that showed at least half of students who participated in some study abroad program are still engaged in a globally engaged mind-set in areas such as civic engagement, philanthropy, knowledge production, social entrepreneurship, and a lifestyle that was environmentally conscious (p. 2).

Much of the well-established research focuses on the U.S. as either a point from which students study abroad or the U.S. as a point to which students from other countries come to study. There are other studies that use other countries as points of reference, including Brazilian students' choice to study in the United Kingdom (Foster, 2014), factors that influenced New Zealand students to study abroad (Doyle et. al, 2010), and Chinese students' choices in choosing universities outside of China (Gong and Huybers, 2015), however the research focused on U.S. study abroad remains more studied than other countries. Furthermore, there is virtually no literature on study abroad for U.S. universities based on study in a foreign country, including New York University Abu Dhabi.

2.1.2 Study Abroad and Program Duration

IIE (2014) reported that over 50 per cent of U.S. study abroad programs were considered “short-term” – defined as lasting less than eight weeks during the school year, January term (which typically lasts no longer than three weeks) and the summer semester (typically studies taking place within the period from mid-May to mid-August for U.S. universities) – showing that along with the increased number of students studying abroad, there has been increased variation in types of study abroad programs offered, including programs of shorter duration. These programs lasting less than eight weeks have typically been classified as a subset of study abroad called *short-term study abroad* or *STSA* (Chieffo & Griffiths, 2004, p. 166).

Study abroad program duration has been well researched, yet there are varying points of view on program duration and program impact. Gudykunst (1979) argued that “contact of only a short duration does not allow enough time to establish attitudes to change. The short duration of the contact results in an incomplete psychological experience for the participants” (p. 4) In an attempt to classify study abroad programs based primarily on program duration, Engle and Engle (2003) developed levels of study abroad to differentiate the expected outcomes based on the length of time of a program, even though they profess that the real aim of their classification system was to find an “encompassing vision of what study abroad is” (p. 19). Medina Lopez Portillo (2004) used Gudykunst’s assertions as a foundation to defend her research on the need for longer program duration to properly achieve intercultural sensitivity among participants of two different study abroad programs to Mexico.

In contrast, Antonakopoulou (2013), in a comparative study of students studying in Greece for three different program lengths (4 weeks, 3-month semester long, and 3-month semester long with formal instruction on learning and living abroad) found that there was a high level of sociocultural adaptation regardless of the program duration.

Duration may be a determinant of value in study abroad experiences when it is used as a heuristic for evaluating a program. However, the contrasting results above show that the effects of program duration on study abroad, while well-researched, remains open and may depend on the framing of the experience and the expected outcomes of particular types of STSA rather than duration alone.

Yueng and Soman (2007) discussed the trappings of using duration instead of framing of program as a measure of quality in consumer research. While their work is arguably incongruent with study abroad program duration, it is thought provoking that some study abroad and STSA researchers, like retail consumers, use duration as a simplistic cue for evaluation.

2.2 Research on Short-term Study Abroad

Using the premise that STSA has at least some impact and effect on students who participate, different types of STSA experiences can be explored. STSA research is a relatively new field relative to general study abroad research, with much of the research emerging in the past 10-20 years. A literature search in the University of Liverpool's Electronic Library – which contains major research databases such as EBSCO, Scopus, and World of Science, among others – using the phrase “short-term study abroad” yielded only 518 results overall, with 515 of those results produced from the past 20 years, and 473 produced during the past 10 years. These numbers suggest that the field is still emerging and there are a number of opportunities to explore new avenues of research.

STSA studies utilize various methodologies and study designs to measure effectiveness of learning outcomes, program design, and evaluation. Large-scale surveys – mostly quantitative in nature – are used to assess program trends and broader outcome categories in STSA programs (Chieffo & Griffiths, 2004; Anderson et. al, 2006; Jackson, 2008, Pedersen, 2009; Kurt, Olitsky & Geis, 2013); qualitative studies attempt to gain a deeper understanding of the experience based on individual and varied responses (Brubaker, 2006; Vandersteen, Hall & Baillie, 2010; Streitweiser & Light, 2011; Mackenzie & Pritchard, 2013); and finally, a number of studies utilize a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to bring about both a broad and in-depth understanding of the STSA experience (Johnson & Battalio, 2008; Nam, 2011; Ching, Lien, & Chao, 2014).

2.2.1 Key Themes of Short-term Study Abroad Research

Although STSA research is new, relative to general study abroad research, a number of themes have emerged. This section will address three particular themes in STSA research – intercultural development, learning, and transformation – that will serve to frame this research.

2.2.1.1 Short-term study abroad research on intercultural

development. The term *intercultural development* comes from Bennett's (1993) developmental model on intercultural sensitivity (DMIS), which is the basis for the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) survey instrument (Hammer, Bennett, & Wiseman, 2003), a tool used widely in STSA and study abroad research (see below for examples). The authors utilize the two terms *intercultural sensitivity* – defined as “the ability to discriminate and experience relevant cultural differences” – and *intercultural competence* – defined as “the ability to think and act in interculturally appropriate ways” – to form the definition of intercultural development (p. 422). For the purposes of this review, the terms *intercultural development* and *intercultural sensitivity* are used interchangeably.

Intercultural development is an oft-used topic in STSA research, and the IDI has been widely-used in STSA research design on intercultural development to assess students' starting points (pre-STSA trip) and/or post-STSA trip outcomes. For example, Anderson et al. (2006) used the IDI as a longitudinal tool in a pilot study to assess intercultural development before and after a 4-week STSA program in the UK and Ireland. This study found that students' levels of intercultural sensitivity increased during the program, and the authors asserted that since students' intercultural sensitivity increased during the 4-week program, students would now be better able to handle intercultural sensitivities back at students' home institution (p. 467). While the study was rigorous in its design, the study applied the IDI to a group of only 16 students during one short-term study abroad experience, which could limit application of findings to other research. Jackson (2009) adopted a mixed approach, using the IDI along with ethnographic methods, to measure both language proficiency and intercultural sensitivity for Hong Kong students who studied in England. Students reported that they were advanced in both areas, but the IDI showed students were lagging in intercultural sensitivity. Finally, Pedersen (2009), mentioned earlier, utilized the IDI comparing a STSA program in psychology with a longer study abroad program in the same discipline to conclude that the longer program supported higher levels of intercultural sensitivity.

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As mentioned above, the criteria for assessing STSA program effectiveness is often based on duration, and studies that utilize the IDI instrument potentially fall into this trap relying on time to increase the chances of greater intercultural sensitivity. This may very well be true for measurement of intercultural sensitivity based on the premise of Bennett's (1993) DMIS model and the IDI. However, a look at other themes illuminates the link between program duration and program effectiveness.

2.2.1.2 Short-term study abroad research on learning. Some STSA programs, like the ones highlighted above, focus on the intercultural development of the student, and some look at this aspect alongside learning outcomes. Learning outcomes in STSA programs can vary considerably, and are highly dependent on creating the proper structure to ensure students achieve their own desired goals.

From a functional perspective, Sachau, Brasher, and Fee (2010) developed an informative model for designing STSA programs for business students. They first discuss educational goals, but soon fall prey to a reliance on program duration to determine goals and objectives, rather than a focus on learning goals no matter what the duration. McLaughlin & Johnson (2006) used constructivist learning theory – defined as learning that is developed or “constructed” by the learner (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007) – to assess a field-based science STSA program. A very helpful framework they use is from Wubbels and Girgus (1997) who stated “constructivist environments in science are created by learning experiences that are ‘active, hands-on, lab-rich, curricularly learn, connected to contexts, and enmeshed in a community of learners’ (p. 66). The constructivist format allows learners to personally construct meaning, which they argue does not happen as much in the science-based classrooms (p. 65). Coryell (2013) conducted research on instructional design of a 3-week adult education STSA program through the use of daily reflection journals, evening debriefs, and focusing on adapting the program as the students progress in their learning experience during the trip. Coryell argued for a holistic approach to short-term study abroad program design including learning opportunities taking place formally, informally, and incidentally during the program (p. 26).

Each of these approaches to understanding learning in STSA programs shows not only a sample of the diversity of STSA programs, but the value of focusing on design, framing, delivery, and, in the case of some programs, the importance of allowing the student to help construct their own experience thereby fostering a more meaningful learning experience (McLaughlin & Johnson, 2006; Coryell, 2013).

2.2.1.3 Short-term study abroad research on transformational learning. Hulstrand (2006) reported that one of the keys to creating and maintaining a high-quality STSA program is students' opportunity to reflect, both during the experience, and after they return. She continued on indicating that many people in the field are now focused on how educators can help students reflect more deeply when participating in STSA programs (Ibid, p. 52). Critical reflection – more specifically critical self-reflection – is a key component of transformative learning, and is a necessary condition in Mezirow's (2000) *transformational learning theory*, which involves the shifting of one's frame(s) of reference and habits of mind. This theory will be presented in greater detail in the next section of this chapter.

Blake-Campbell (2014), who wrote about an STSA program to Austria offered by an urban community college in the United States, pointed to STSA programs as a catalyst for transformative learning and a viable option for setting students on the pathway to being more globally-minded through the shaping of ideas of ethics, empathy, and engagement (p. 69). Rowan-Kenyon & Niehaus (2011) in their case study research on students (n=8) from an STSA program offered by a U.S. higher education institution to the Czech Republic one year after their return, concluded that like the study above, transformative learning is possible, but it is not expected to happen to everyone. Additionally, the findings suggest that STSA programs can serve to transform students by acting as a gateway or divergent path toward experiences that will transform their future. Finally, VeLure Roholt & Fisher (2013) produced a rich discussion in their study on various STSA social work programs. They use the concept of *critical incident*, a kind of disorienting dilemma and an aspect of critical thinking used by Brookfield (1998) in his development of the Critical Incident Questionnaire (CIQ), to bring about transformation in social work curriculum. The idea of critical incident can be

compared to Mezirow's (2000) concept where transformative learning is based on a specific moment rather than incrementally over time (this will be discussed further in the next section). VeLure Roholt & Fisher (2013) summed up the broad aims of transformative STSA experiences:

Short-term study abroad courses must perform (at least) dual functions: deliver course content in an international setting and support perspective transformation. The first receives much attention in the literature; we argue the second is equally imperative. These courses should deliver a strong academic curriculum and support a process of becoming culturally aware of how and why our presuppositions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand and feel about the world. (p. 58)

The above sections reviewed samples of literature from short-term study abroad programs, showing that research on STSA can take on many structural forms, and have different themes – only a handful of which were illustrated above for the purposes of framing this research project. In sum, STSA programs, which encompass constructivist learning through critical reflection during and after the experience, could be a type of study abroad program less dependent on duration as an assessment of quality rather than framing of the program, and could be a space for transformative learning.

2.3 Research on Transformative Learning

Transformative (or transformational) learning (TL) covers a wide spectrum of research, from different theoretical strands to different contexts studied. Tisdell (2012) stated that there are many themes and variations of transformative learning, and she goes on to talk about three primary discourses in adult education and TL: Jack Mezirow's (1978) work with adult women learners and the development of a 10-element process he termed *perspective transformation*; Edmund O'Sullivan's (1999) work on a vision and philosophy of transformational education rather than a focus on the learning process; and the third, social transformation, which is focused more on transformation as discussed through critical race, gender, sexuality, and religious theories (p. 21). Adult education, for the purposes of this research project, is described by Halx (2010) as education "acknowledging life

experience as a resource for learning” (p. 523). Halx’s research posits that adult education theories and principles, including andragogy (the adult education concept of autonomous and self-directed learning), critical thinking, and TL, along with learning modes such as service learning, can and should reshape traditional undergraduate education.

The following review will focus on Mezirow’s (1997, 2000) updated model of perspective transformation, which he terms *transformative learning theory* (or *TLT*), and is the most appropriate transformative learning model for this research as the other two types of TL shown above focus on philosophical and social aspects of TL, whereas Mezirow’s work addresses TL more broadly. Mezirow’s TLT is a starting point for critique and a frame for beginning the discussion of outcomes later in this research, including more contemporary, holistic views of transformative learning, moving from the individual to the social (Cranton & Taylor, 2012, p. 12).

2.3.1 Transformative Learning Theory

Mezirow’s (1997) Transformative Learning Theory, originally termed as *perspective transformation*, describes shifts in one’s frame of reference through “critical reflection on assumptions upon which our interpretations, beliefs, and habits of mind or points of view are based” (p. 7). TLT is heavily influenced by Freire’s concept of *praxis* – a process of action and reflection, which emancipates and transforms the learner by enabling one to reflect on the world and change it (Dirkx, 1998).

2.3.1.1 Critiques of transformative learning theory. Baumgartner (2012) developed a comprehensive history of TLT from inception in the 1970s to the present time. In it, she notes that there was a critique of TLT in the late 1980s by Collard and Law (1989), who argued that Mezirow’s work is lacking a comprehensive theory social change, which they argue is embedded in the theory’s internal structure, and TLT is not a theory as much as a fragment of a theory (p. 102). Mezirow’s overreliance on Habermas’ theories served to only limit the reach of Mezirow’s TL concepts. During the same year, Mezirow (1989) wrote a reaction to Collard and Law stating their assertions were unfounded. Mezirow acknowledged that Habermas had moved on from his own points of view, and although Collard and Law asserted that Mezirow had

not moved on, he claims to have moved on and indeed in a different direction. This is an important critique because, as Baumgartner (2012) wrote, although Mezirow's defence of his theory was valid according to her analysis, future shaping of TLT would be influenced by Collard and Law's observations (p. 104).

Subsequent critiques of TLT involved the lack of a critical theory or postmodern focus (Clark & Wilson, 1991), decontextualizing action (Newman (1994), relying too much on modernism and not addressing the social context of transformation (Pietrykowski, 1996). The most important review of TLT was done by Taylor (1997), where thirty-nine studies on transformation were reviewed against the theory, and the researchers of these studies found that although Mezirow's original theory was supported by the research, it often fell short of addressing a host of factors that also contribute to transformation, including affective learning, non-conscious learning, the importance of relationships, collective unconscious, and context. In discussion context, Taylor noted that studies that support context, "encourage a conception of learning, such as situated cognition, that is not bound by the narrow confines of the psychological to construction of knowledge that is situated personally and historically" (p. 54). Simply put, transformative learning must account for the social context as much as it accounts for the individual context. Mezirow (1998, 2000, 2003) took into account these critiques, whilst still maintaining the central tenets of transformative learning theory; meaning perspectives or *frames of reference*, *habits of mind*, and critical reflection evolved, but remained intact in their structure. Yet his writing on TLT evolved to include the role of emotions, context, and the movement from the rational to the reflective.

The inclusion of discussions on context and reflection are of particular note to my research, given the context of academic travel and its potential as a critically reflective, transformative experience. Ongoing critical research of TLT encompassing affect, cognition, and social context – are key to gaining a better understanding of the theory. Social context can be understood through the perspective of transformative learning as a group space (Schapiro, Wasserman & Gallegos, 2012) and transformative learning as a social action (Brookfield, 2000) in the outcome space of this research as a group space for transformative learning.

2.3.1.2 Frames of reference. A *frame of reference* is a meaning perspective, with cognitive and affective dimensions, that provides context for making meaning and choosing how experiences are construed or appropriated (Mezirow, 2000, p. 16). Frames of references can be individual through a single person experience, or develop into shared meanings (or paradigms) that, along with a critical reflection on assumptions, can help to solve, define, redefine, or reframe a problem or perspective. This process is primarily justified through discourse (*Ibid.*, p. 20).

2.3.1.3 Habits of mind. Frames of reference consist of two parts: a *habit of mind* and resulting points of view. A *habit of mind* consists of a set of assumptions that can help to filter meanings in experiences (*Ibid.*, p. 17).

Habits of mind come in a number of different varieties, including:

- Sociolinguistic (ideologies, customs)
 - Moral-ethical (conscience, moral norms)
 - Epistemic (learning styles, sensory preferences, focus on wholes of parts or on the concrete or abstract)
 - Philosophical (religious doctrine, transcendental world view)
 - Psychological (self-concept, personality traits or types, continuation of repressed feelings from childhood, emotional response patterns)
 - Aesthetic (values, tastes, attitudes, standards, judgments of beauty)
- (*Ibid.*)

The addition of the habits of mind concept to TLT by Mezirow in 2000 signals a move to respond to critics that the theory would consider frames of reference beyond cognitive dimensions to a more holistic space. TLT could now be applied not just to rational forms of learning, but to emotions, affective responses, and ideologies.

2.3.1.4 Critical reflection. As a key component of TLT, *critical reflection* can have different meanings depending on the source. Brookfield (2000) seeks to differentiate the terms *reflection* and *critical reflection* by claiming that for reflection to be critical, it “must engage in some sort of power analysis of the situation or context in which the learning is happening” (p. 126). This does not mean that all critical reflection sit in a political or economic context, but it does involve the challenging of dominant discourses, regardless

of the field of study, or if the learning is in the emotional dimension (p. 127). Kreber (2012) identifies two levels of critical reflection: one that can be about testing and contesting assumptions within established discourses, or one testing and contesting the discourse itself (p. 328). Kreber's descriptions are aligned with Mezirow's (1998) taxonomy of two different levels of critical reflection – *critical reflection on assumptions* (CRA), and *critical self-reflection on assumptions* (CSRA), which he describes as *objective reframing* and *subjective reframing*, respectively. The following subsections will review critical reflection on assumptions and critical self-reflection on assumptions together, followed by the concept of *reflective judgment* (an important concept Mezirow uses in his discussion on critical reflection on assumptions), and a discussion of the link between these concepts and lifeworld theory.

2.3.1.4.1 Critical reflection on assumptions and critical self-reflection on assumptions. Mezirow (1998) discussed CRA as central to adult learning, encompassing a number of theories, including TLT (p. 185). CRA, which Mezirow also called *objective reframing* (p. 192), is broken down into subcategories, including narrative CRA and action CRA. Narrative CRA involves the critical examination of observational items such as books (literary criticism and paintings (aesthetic judgment) that cause us to critically examine established theories and practices. (*Ibid.*). Action CRA involves pondering one's own assumptions when solving a problem to help reframe the problem and improve performance.

A deeper version of CRA is called critical self-reflection on assumptions (CSRA), also known as *subjective reframing*, in which one's psychological and conceptual limitations are critically analysed and is the process involved in major perspective transformations (*Ibid.*, p. 193). CSRA is not just reframing a problem; it is questioning the assumptions underlying the thoughts and feelings in how we come to frame our experiences. While not explicitly referenced in later works, some kinds of critical reflection on assumptions and critical self-reflection on assumptions helped to form Mezirow's (2000) *habits of mind*. In particular, epistemic CSRA (the ability for a learner to assess any assumptions and understand how they have come to know what they know) could be seen as a collection of many kinds of assumptions as these assumptions relate to learning. Mezirow (1998) wrote

“the reframing process [in epistemic CSRA] is not directed at solving an immediate problem but on explicitly identifying one’s frames of reference, their sources, and implications for understanding the world” (p. 195). When Mezirow arrived at the discussion of epistemic CSRA, he brought his argument full circle. In the beginning of his discussion of CRA, he uses empirical research on reflective judgment (defined and discussed below), which he argues as a foundation for CRA and offers a view congruent with TLT (p. 189-190). Brookfield (2000) also argued that epistemic CSRA is the basis for ideology critique, described as critical reflection on the power structures that utilize norms of social structure of dialogue and social rules to govern conversation and difference (p. 136). In sum, epistemic CSRA encompasses both reflective judgment and ideology critique. This thesis is focused on reflective judgment as a means to better understand how learners develop epistemic cognition – defined by Kitchener (1983) as a level of cognition where “individuals reflect on the limits of knowing, the certainty of knowing, and the criteria for knowing” (p. 222) – rather than an assessment of their critical reflection of power relationships in learning.

2.3.1.4.2 Reflective judgment. The term *epistemic CSRA* is a very similar concept to the term *reflective judgment* (RJ), both of which seek to understand epistemic cognition by challenging taken-for-granted assumptions about learning. King & Kitchener (1994) wrote:

Reflective judgments are made by examining and evaluating relevant information, opinion, and available explanations (the process of reflective thinking), then constructing a plausible solution for the problem at hand, acknowledging that the solution itself is open to further evaluation and scrutiny. (p. 18)

Using this description of reflective thinking and reflective judgment, King and Kitchener developed the Reflective Judgment Model (RJM), a three-level, seven-stage sequential developmental model that assesses a person’s level of reflective thinking and self-management of epistemic assumptions; the higher the stage, the more reflective the thinking. RJM was developed from Dewey’s (1933, as cited in King & Kitchener, 1994) seminal work on reflective thinking, Perry’s (1968, as cited in King & Kitchener, 1994) positions on intellectual and ethical development, and Broughton’s (1975) model of natural

epistemology. Both Perry's model and Broughton's model suggested a sequential development, yet fell short of clearly demarcating the relationship between epistemology and judgement at each point in the development sequence (King & Kitchener, 1994).

More recently, Pike (2011), in a review of the Reflective Judgment Interview (RJI), the instrument used by King and Kitchener to assess reflective judgment, asserted that the RJI produces accurate and appropriate information about the ways in which students reason about complex, ill-defined problems (p. 12). Additionally, studies utilizing RJM have confirmed its effectiveness. For instance, Friedman & Schoen (2009) used RJM in a case study (n=16) to recommend interventions in developing teacher learning and looked at ways these interventions could increase reflective judgment levels. In another example, Love and Guthrie (1999) concluded RJM was an effective tool for student affairs educators given the prevalence of ill-structured problems in student life work.

Ten years from the original publishing of their book on RJM, King & Kitchener (2004) gave a status update on RJM, positing that the model was still as valid as it ever was, with educational attainment still the primary determinant of progression through the stages. This update from the original authors, and other research such as those discussed above, suggests that RJM is still applicable in the assessment of learner's epistemic cognition.

2.3.1.4.3 Critical reflection, reflective judgment, and lifeworld.

Critical reflection on assumptions, critical self-reflection on assumptions, and reflective judgment relate to the extent to which a person utilizes critical reflection and reflective thinking in developing their epistemic cognition and potential for transformative learning. As a way of further contextualizing the place these concepts fit holistically, a discussion of the concept of *lifeworld* is one way to discuss placement of these learning concepts in the context of the whole person. Lifeworld can be defined simply as "the undivided unity between a person and the world" (Ekebergh, 2009). Lifeworld can be described a number of different ways, as will be discussed in the proceeding and final section of this literature review. TLT (including CRA, CSRA), and RJ (including epistemic cognition and reflective thinking) can be situated in lifeworld theory, which can be further specified as the *learning lifeworld*, a

term adapted from the term “student lifeworld” used by Ashworth and Lucas (2000), that forms the conceptual framework for this research.

The preceding section presented TL and more specifically TLT, a dominant theory to better understand a kind of learning experience. Key components of contemporary TLT include frames of reference – constituting habits of mind and resulting points of view – and critical reflection, which can be broken down into critical reflection on assumptions (CRA) and critical self-reflection on assumptions (CSRA). One kind of CSRA, epistemic CSRA, can be linked to the learning concept of reflective judgement. Together, these concepts form part of the lifeworld, and more specifically the *learning lifeworld*, which can be a space for exploring the research questions for this study.

2.4 Research on Lifeworld

In this final section of the literature review, literature on the lifeworld are presented and critiqued. In particular, an initial discussion of *Lebenswelt*, Edmund Husserl’s analysis of lifeworld, will be presented. Then, a different analysis of lifeworld will be offered through Jürgen Habermas’ concept of lifeworld, leading to literature on lifeworld and learning, and finally a discussion of the *learning lifeworld*, leading to an overall conclusion of the literature review.

2.4.1 Husserl’s “Lifeworld”

Edmund Husserl, a noted philosopher and founder of phenomenological philosophy, first termed *lifeworld* (or *Lebenswelt* in the original German) in 1936 in a book entitled *The Crisis of The European Sciences*, in which he described the lifeworld as “the world that is constantly pre-given, valid constantly and in advance as existing” (Gross, 2010, p. 120). Gross continues to explain that Husserl’s lifeworld is inherently subjective, and at the same time intersubjective, and this intersubjectivity is universal through the shared horizon of a particular era in history, and a more universal lifeworld encompassing our shared experience on earth (*Ibid.*).

Husserl’s lifeworld theory formed the basis for phenomenology as a school of thought, and furthermore as a research approach focused on lived

experience. The key tool of lifeworld theory is “disciplined reflection”, which involves accessing previous understanding and is the platform for starting and continuing the learning process (Ekebergh, 2009, p. 53-54). The primary component of Husserl’s lifeworld is what Gross (2010) called the sensible phenomenal world and includes certain cultural objects and properties (p. 120). Gross argued that the inclusion of cultural factors in lifeworld opens the door for movement from Husserl’s phenomenological structure of the theory to a more socially-oriented structure of lifeworld theory posited by Schütz and Habermas (*Ibid.*). Although Schütz is a very important figure in lifeworld theory, my research is much more interested in the work of Habermas. Schütz, similar to Husserl, framed his lifeworld theory in individual consciousness, continuing the presupposition of the individual as the central focus of lifeworld theory (*Ibid.*, p. 121). Habermas’ lifeworld theory is grounded in communicative action, one that relies more on intersubjectivity as the primary working space rather than the individual, subjective consciousness, signalling a departure from Husserl and Schütz, opening the possibility of a lifeworld theory focused not on the individual, but on the social and the collective.

2.4.2 Habermas’ “Lifeworld”

Indeed, Habermas believes that whilst Husserl and Schütz were interested in a universal lifeworld, the need to go beyond generalisation of one’s own experience on the basis of individual consciousness is not sufficient (*Ibid.*). Instead, the social lifeworld needs to stop being expressed as the amalgam of every possible individual lifeworld, and a lifeworld theory based on communicative action rather than individual consciousness, finding structure of individual lifeworlds through communication experienced in a social context (*Ibid.* p. 122).

In his two-volume work, Habermas (1984, 1987) proposes a theory of communicative action, which uses language as the fundamental component of society and is the process through which people form their identities. Communicative action signals a departure from the individual and the objective, and views society as intersubjective through two lenses: the internal subjective viewpoint of lived experience (lifeworld) and the external viewpoint

of this lived experience (systems). For Habermas, there are three components of lifeworld: culture (implicitly known traditions, background assumptions of language embedded in everyday life), society (how people coordinate their actions through intersubjectively recognized norms), and the personal (internalizing value orientations and developing individual and social identities) (Crick & Joldersma, 2011, p. 79)

This shift from the individually-focused to the socially-focused is negotiated through the application of the lifeworld lens to the external lens of systems. In other words, we can rely on the variation of lifeworlds to help us better understand how the system is structured in its diversity of lived experiences. Furthermore, a basis for how individuals live together in a society is the need for critical reflection to become an inherent part of people's lifeworld, which is supported by Habermas' theory of communicative action (Kreber, 2012).

2.4.3 The Learning Lifeworld

Learning can be seen as a process of personal development and reflection (Ekebergh, 2009) and as a socially constructive process (McLaughlin & Johnson, 2006; Merriam, Caffarella & Baumgartner, 2007). In looking at how learning interacts with lifeworld theory, the bulk of this research has been conducted by Peter Ashworth and his associates. Ashworth and Lucas (1998) advocated for the usage of the phenomenological concept of (Husserl's) lifeworld in studies on student learning conceptions in a phenomenographic study, directly linking lifeworld theory to the research approach of phenomenography. They wrote, "we use the fact that much of phenomenologically-based work has documented issues connected with the process of entering into the student life world; it is well for phenomenographers to try and profit from this wealth of experience" (Ibid, p. 417). Ashworth (2004) posited learning (more specifically the learning lifeworld) as an interpretive process where understanding is the end goal and best understood from the point of view of the learner. Whilst he notes that there is very little literature that supports this point of view, he offers the literature of phenomenography – defined by Marton (1981) as "research which aims at description, analysis, and understanding of experiences; that is,

research that is oriented toward experiential description” (p. 181) – as one source of looking at prior understanding in learning, but only to a certain extent.

Ashworth (2004) rejects the Husserlian notion of lifeworld manifesting through individual consciousness; rather, learning and the establishment of the learning lifeworld comes about through conversation, which supports the Habermasian lifeworld theory of communicative action, although Ashworth never directly points to this connection. This is a curious position to take given Ashworth and Lucas’s (1998) attempt to bring the concept of lifeworld to the phenomenographic approach to learning via Husserl. They argue that a bracketing of Husserl’s lifeworld theory can help to better understand presupposition.

2.4.3.1 Accessing the learning lifeworld. There appears to be a contradiction in Ashworth’s research. If conversation is indeed a key component for learning, then Habermas’ (1984, 1987) theory of communicative action, which uses language as the key ingredient for understanding lifeworld, could lead to a better linkage for understanding the learning lifeworld. Understanding variation of learning experiences could produce a framework for access to learning lifeworlds. Greasley & Ashworth (2007) use a phenomenological approach to attempt entering university students’ lifeworlds, which they believe is the least constraining way to enter the unique individual student lifeworld. Phenomenology, according to Marton (1986), focuses on immediate experience, bracketing conceptual thought (p. 41), which may limit application of lifeworld theory to learning in a social context.

This places phenomenology clearly in the space of the individual, attempting to find meaning in the individual experience, which can on its own allow access to the lifeworld. But if we rely too much on a Husserlian stance to lifeworld, as noted above through the evolution of phenomenology by Schütz and Habermas, the connection between lifeworld and the social world is in danger of being overlooked. The relationship between lifeworld and the social world has already been established through Habermas’ evolution of Husserl’s ideas. Habermas’ lifeworld theory applied to a given experience could be discussed qualitatively through a finite number of variations through

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the social integration of lifeworlds, formed through collective narratives. This framework – lifeworld of individuals going through the same experience – can produce categories in this finite system, which helps capture variation in experience, and better understand the categorical ways these variations exist. This way of accessing can be done through the research orientation of phenomenography. Phenomenography takes an approach to learning where “experience of the world is a relation between [the learner] and his world. Instead of two independent descriptions, and an assumed relationship between the two, we have one description which is of a relational character” (Marton & Svensson, 1979, p. 472). Therefore, access to the learning lifeworld is achieved in the context of the social world around the learner.

2.4.3.2 The learning lifeworld as collective and reflective. If the inner world and the (controlled) social world of the learner are connected through a single, relational approach, and described in relation to other unique experiences of a given phenomenon, there is a collective dimension to this approach to the learning lifeworld. If phenomenography is a way to marry the inner dimension of the lifeworld and the external (social) dimension of learning, these variations in experiences can be collectively captured through the phenomenographic unit of description, the *conception*, which comprises a referential aspect (particular meaning of an individual object) and a structural aspect (the combination of features discerned or focused upon by the subjects) (Marton & Pong, 2005, p. 336). Conceptions are not unique to phenomenography. In the context of learning, Perry (1970, as cited in Entwistle and Peterson, 2004) introduced a comprehensive developmental model of students’ conceptions of knowledge and learning. Entwistle and Peterson (2004) argue that the work of phenomenography parallels Perry’s conceptions of knowledge.

Conceptions can yield a space for understanding the variations in learning, but how can we know if research participants (students in this research) have the capacity to accurately and authentically reflect and report on their learning to help gain a better understanding of a phenomenon? As mentioned earlier in this chapter, learning can be constructed by the learner, which supports the assertion in phenomenography that learning is what we construe from the learner’s experience. However, there could be a reflective

aspect to learning, especially one in which we critically reflect on assumptions we hold. This reflective capacity can be determined using RJM as a means to better understand levels of reflective thinking. King & Kitchener (1994) also use Perry's model as a basis for differentiating and developing RJM (p. 36-37). The link between phenomenography and reflective judgment can capture both the learning outcomes of an experience, and the ability for the researcher to understand the capacity of the individual learner to show epistemic cognition, and therefore could produce a more authentic account of the learning lifeworld.

2.5 Conclusion

This literature review has been a journey across various areas of inquiry important to this thesis. Short-term study abroad research was discussed and critiqued, both structurally and topically, setting up the potential for STSA to be a transformative learning experience. Transformative Learning Theory and its components were presented with a particular focus on critical reflection and the connection between critical reflection in TLT and reflective judgment through epistemic critical self-reflection on assumptions. Lifeworld theory was then discussed broadly in relation to its original concepts offered by Husserl, followed by a different perspective on lifeworld theory by Habermas, connecting TLT to lifeworld theory. Lifeworld theory was then framed for the purposes of this research in the context of learning. Learning lifeworld was then argued as a phenomenographic concept. Finally, learning lifeworlds were discussed as a collective concept through the phenomenographic unit of conception, and as a concept linked to reflective thinking. Reflective thinking, as argued above, could lead to an authentic account of experience. A more authentic account of the learning lifeworld through the link between phenomenography and reflective judgment is one key gap in research that this thesis aims to explore. Phenomenography and RJM were linked together by their origins in Perry's work, and can now be developed into a hybrid research approach.

Chapter 3 – Research Methodology

This chapter presents the detailed description and rationale for the chosen research methodology, and is divided into seven sections. The first section is a restatement of the research aims and research questions from the first chapter. In the second section, the qualitative interpretive research paradigm frames the choice combining phenomenography and reflective judgment research methods, followed in the third section by a specific discussion on each of these methods, including ontological and epistemological assumptions, methods employed, critiques of each method, culminating in a final subsection on the combination of phenomenography and reflective judgment. The fourth and fifth sections outline the research design and data analysis procedures. Finally, the sixth and seventh sections will discuss validity, reliability, and ethical considerations.

3.1 Research Aims and Research Questions

Short-term student abroad programs offer students an opportunity to participate in study trips enabling students to connect their academic (classroom-based) studies with on-the-ground experiential study, research, and intercultural exploration. STSA research is a relatively new field of inquiry compared to general study abroad research. Within STSA research, there is research assessing the value of STSA through broad measurements of outcomes, in-depth understanding of individual experience, and research which attempts to achieve both broad outcomes and in-depth understanding. STSA relies on general study abroad research as a starting point to assess effectiveness. Often, these studies have defaulted to program duration as a means to assess quality, relying less on the quality of the program framing as a way to assess learning. Existing STSA research also relies on study abroad research methods and paradigms, which have the potential to narrow outcomes of STSA research. NYU Abu Dhabi has named these experiences *regional academic travel*, removing the durational moniker, allowing the opportunity to focus on how framing, not duration, impacts student learning.

The aim of this research was to gain a deeper understanding of student learning as a result of participation in a Regional Academic Travel experience

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offered by NYU Abu Dhabi's Office of Global Education. The research aim focused on accessing the student lifeworld through the development of conceptions, which capture the unique variation and transformative potential of individual learning experiences. These individual learning experiences were categorized and yielded an outcome space comprising conceptions of learning experiences. Whilst these conceptions have taken learning impact into account, they do not fully address the critically reflective dimension of learning, which is a necessary component in understanding the learning lifeworld of students. To address this gap, student reflective thinking can be determined using the Reflective Judgment Model (King & Kitchener, 1994) to measure reflective thinking abilities, and, used in conjunction with the conceptions of learning experiences, can serve to assess the transformative learning potential of these regional academic travel trips, and to inform best practices at NYU Abu Dhabi's Office of Global Education and similar programs at other institutions. Based on these research aims, the research questions being investigated are:

- What are the qualitatively different ways students experience particular regional academic travel trips at NYU Abu Dhabi?
- How can these qualitatively different ways – manifested as conceptions of learning experiences – be used in conjunction with an assessment of reflective thinking ability to yield deeper insights into the learning lifeworld?
- How can understanding of the learning lifeworld inform the transformative learning potential of particular regional academic travel experiences at NYU Abu Dhabi, and be used to inform and improve future regional academic travel offered by NYUAD's Office of Global Education?

3.2 Research Paradigm

The learning lifeworld is not a concept that is entirely an internal concept, nor is it entirely external; it is neither wholly subjective nor wholly objective. Lifeworld theory, according to Habermas (1984, 1987) is an intersubjective notion, bridging the inner world of individual experience with

the communicative nature of the external world. Lifeworld originally comes from a phenomenological research approach. Yet, as shown in the previous chapter (see page 28), there is a way for this concept to be used in phenomenography as well. This research is rooted in the interpretive qualitative research paradigm, described as a combination of discovering and understanding a phenomenon, a process, perspective and worldviews of people involved in the study are the possible foci of the research, where analysis is done inductively to seek patterns and themes across the data (Merriam, 2002, p. 6). One type of interpretive research approach is phenomenography, which Marton (1986) defined as “a research method adapted for mapping the qualitatively different ways in which people experience, conceptualise, perceive, and understand various aspects of, and phenomena in, the world around them” (p. 31). Additionally, this research utilizes the Reflective Judgment Model (RJM) (King & Kitchener, 1994), which is meant to measure reflective thinking. RJM, like phenomenography, is supported by the interpretive research paradigm by seeking participants’ understanding, perspective, and meaning through the posing of questions to an ill-structured problem.

3.3 Research Methods Selected

This section will first present phenomenography as a research method, including ontological and epistemological assumptions, methods and outcomes, and critiques. The following subsection on reflective judgment (RJ) is similarly organized to the section on phenomenography, starting with ontological and epistemological assumptions, a presentation of the levels and stages of RJ, methods and outcomes, and finally critiques of the model. The final subsection will discuss the combination of phenomenography and RJ.

3.3.1 Phenomenography

The history of phenomenography is short relative to other research methods. While the term phenomenography was first coined as far back as 1954 (Sonneman, 1954 as cited in Hasselgren and Beach, 1997), the usage at that time was related to psycho-pathological research. Whilst prior research was conducted pertaining to specific aspects that led to defining the

phenomenographic research tradition, including student learning process and learning outcomes (Marton and Säljö, 1976), and conceptions of learning (Dahlgren and Marton, 1978; Dahlgren, 1979), it is Marton's 1981 article, and his subsequent article defining phenomenographic methods (Marton, 1986) that most defined phenomenography as a unique research method. The more contemporary usage of the term *phenomenography* first appeared in Marton's (1981) seminal work: "The kind of research we wish to argue for is complementary to other kinds of research. It is research which aims at description, analysis, and understanding of experiences; that is, research which is directed toward experiential description" (p. 180).

Bowden (1986, as cited in Bowden, 2000) developed an alternate way of thinking about outcomes of phenomenographic research by arguing for actionable change in a teaching and learning context. Bowden (2000) termed his approach *developmental phenomenography* (phenomenography encompassing formal and informal learning experiences the outcomes of which can help organize future learning experiences) in contrast to *pure phenomenography* (phenomenography focused on how a student learns in relation to an aspect of reality), and stresses usage of outcomes to enact change rather than simply the identification of learning conceptions related to a phenomenon.

Given the research practice implications, as evidenced in the research questions, Bowden's (*Ibid.*) developmental phenomenography, which does not differ much in execution from pure phenomenography except at the outcome stage where conceptions are contextualized to a field of study.

Given the similarities between pure phenomenography and developmental phenomenography, it is possible to talk of the foundations of both in a singular discussion. For the subsequent sections, phenomenography will mean both pure phenomenography and developmental phenomenography, and the usage of "pure" or "developmental" will be used only when it is necessary to distinguish the two.

3.3.1.1 Ontological assumptions of phenomenography.

Phenomenography assumes a non-dualist ontology, which rejects the idea that there is a "real world" outside of the learner (positivist) and a subjective world inside of the learner (constructivist); rather, "there is only one world, but

it is a world that we experience, a world in which we live, a world which is ours” (Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 13). Svensson (1997) also supports a non-dualist ontology, although he expresses this singular world as manifested through conceptions, expressed through a social and cultural language context, yet he also posits that there are no specific overarching ontological assumptions guiding phenomenographic research. Phenomenology assumes a dualist structure by attempting to describe essence and structure of experience that was unaffected by scientific thought and serves as the most fundamental difference between phenomenology and phenomenography (Marton, 1986, p. 41).

3.3.1.2 Epistemological assumptions of phenomenography.

Svensson (1997) argued that conceptions, which ontologically constituted the research object of phenomenography, incorporated knowledge through conceptions, thereby incorporated phenomenography’s epistemological approach as well (p. 167). Richardson (1999) took the position that phenomenography is closer to realism than constructivism based on the finite number of discoverable categories that are meant to exist within conceptions. The assumption of structural relationships between ways of experiencing also forms an epistemological assumption of phenomenography (Åkerlind, 2005). Conceptions are typically presented as *categories of description*, which represents a decision point for the researcher that should be acknowledged (Bowden, 2000, p. 14-15). Categories of description are formed from pools of meaning that represent both the individual context from which it came and collective meaning for which it belongs (Marton, 1986, p. 43). Sandberg (1997) wrote “the more faithful we, as researchers, can be to individuals’ conceptions of an aspect of reality, the better we are able to understand learning, teaching and other kinds of human action within society” (p. 204).

Therefore, the epistemological assumptions in phenomenography are embedded within conceptions, comprised of categories of description taken as collective understandings from individual accounts of learning experiences. The methods by which these individual accounts become categories of description and conceptions will be discussed in the methods section below.

3.3.1.3 Phenomenographic research methods. Methods used to perform phenomenographic research, whilst varied in practice, are quite similar to other qualitative research methods, until the researcher arrives at the analysis stage, which is often the place where phenomenographic research begins (Bowden, 2000). Richardson (1999) supported this by calling early phenomenographic research methods “unremarkable” and “indistinguishable to grounded theory” (p. 68). Ashworth & Lucas (2000) borrowed from phenomenological methods to develop a broadly-written practical guide for phenomenographic research. They emphasize, through a nine-point list, the need to bracket presuppositions, specifically earlier research findings, the bias of the researcher, assumption of specific research techniques, and a pre-understood cause of certain participant experiences (p. 298). More recently, Pherali (2011) offered concise and clear methodological steps taken in his study on environmental conceptions, which seemed to be more hands-on than that of Ashworth and Lucas. However, these examples, along with others (Richardson, 1999; Bowden, 2000; Åkerlind, 2005) do not offer a distinct approach in phenomenographic research. This research, focused on both learning and recommendations for practice, has adopted developmental phenomenography research methods (Bowden, 2000).

3.3.1.3.1 Purpose and planning. Bowden (2000) stresses the need to have a clear purpose and a strategy during all stages of research. The choice of a phenomenographic method fits the stated research aims of this project, and is further illuminated in Trigwell’s (2000) account of why phenomenography is an attractive research method:

...at the methodological level, the idea of looking in a mass of (loosely constrained) data for some order, and qualitative differences and relations, is more appealing in complex situations where, at times, our knowledge seems limited, than prescribing the parameters into which data will be channelled. (p. 65)

An important purpose of this research is to capture the variations of each student experience, and phenomenography offers a framework for achieving this purpose.

3.3.1.3.2 The phenomenographic interview. Research interviews are an often-used data collection tool in phenomenographic research (Richardson, 1999; Walsh, 2000). Bowden (2000) stressed the need for an initial set of structured questions followed by open-ended questions to allow the participant to offer their own ways of understanding the experience. Marton (1986) also highlighted the need of open-ended questions to allow participants to express the relevance of their own dimension of understanding. Francis (1993, cited in Walsh, 2000) supported the need for some pre-determined leading questions and prompts to focus the interview to the study. This research utilized a structured set of opening questions informed by the literature and the research goals of this project, followed by open-ended questions based on the participant's responses to the initial questions, allowing the participant to direct the conversation if they chose to do so.

3.3.1.3.3 Phenomenographic analysis. The analytic stage is the most distinguishable research stage of phenomenographic research, and involves the development of categories of description from a thorough review of transcripts. Bowden (2000) argued that phenomenographic analysis begins with the research intentions and ends when the final categories of description are developed. In his argument, Bowden uses the terms *categories of description* and *conceptions* as synonyms given his assertion that that the two terms create a kind of confusion (p. 17). My research utilized the terms distinctively, and denotes *categories of description* as the list of pooled meanings developed from the individual experience. *Conceptions* in my research were considered to be categories of description set in logical relationship to one another, which took place in the outcome space of phenomenographic analysis.

3.3.1.3.4 Phenomenographic outcome space. Åkerlind (2005) described *outcome space* in phenomenographic research as the point where the categories of description are set in logical relationship to one another. She wrote "the researcher aims to constitute not just a set of different meanings, but a logically inclusive structure relating the different meanings" (p. 323). The point at which the logical relationship between categories of description is made in the outcome space is when categories of description become conceptions. Phenomenographic analysis ends once the outcome space is

completed. In this research, the resulting conceptions were matched with individual reflective judgment scores as described and justified in the data analysis section below.

3.3.1.4 Critiques of phenomenography. Some discussions above included critiques of phenomenography (e.g., Hasselgren & Beach, 1997) and there are other critiques, most notably Webb's (1997), in which he stated, "the position of phenomenography in terms of values and interests, especially with regard to theories of knowledge such as critical theory or critical hermeneutics, remains largely unexplored" (p. 199). However, Webb footnotes this point by specifying the emancipatory interest of critical theory as the point of neglect in phenomenography. This lack of the critical can carry over to the lack of critical reflection in phenomenographic research. Interviews in qualitative research are inherently reflective, which assumes a basic looking back to one's experience. However, the need to be critically reflective in phenomenography can support Bowden's (2000) stance on phenomenography as a change agent, and can be substantiated by Habermas (1984, 1987) theories that bridged the lifeworld and the social world. Ashworth and Lucas (1998, 2000) stressed the importance of borrowing from (a Husserlian viewpoint of) phenomenology as a means to gain a deeper understanding of lifeworld and conceptions, yet Habermas' work on lifeworld is essentially overlooked in these conversations.

Therefore, in order to better understand how developmental phenomenography can truly inform practice, it is also important to understand the reflective thinking ability of students, which will offer further insight into the authenticity of responses received. In other words, measuring epistemic cognition could produce greater evidence that students have the capacity for not only basic reflection, but for critical reflection, which in turn could lead to a better understanding of the student's learning lifeworld, and the transformative potential of their learning.

3.3.2 Reflective Judgment

A section of Chapter 2 was devoted to discussing reflective judgment as part of a discussion on critical reflection. This section discusses the foundations of King & Kitchener's (1994) Reflective Judgment Model (RJM) –

a three-level seven-stage developmental model for reflective thinking –, a description of the levels and stages of RJM, methods, and finally critiques.

3.3.2.1 Ontological assumptions of the reflective judgment model.

Hammer and Elby (2004) describe models such as RJM as having a unitarity ontology, which presumes a single uncontextualized belief structure. Unitarity – defined as a unit of cognitive structure that an individual does or does not have – is heavily criticized by the authors as being a presupposition for models such as RJM, and assumes a consistency that may exist in the control of research, but may not exist in the actual learning space. For this research, Hammer and Elby's critique is moot for two reasons. First, the usage of RJM in this research is meant as a more general measurement of reflective thinking distanced from context as means to generally measure epistemic cognition, which could then be applied to a number of different contexts, including the context of this research. Second, Hammer and Elby (*Ibid.*) bracketed their conversation stating their focus was on science and science learning (specifically introductory physics) but their contentions also apply to beliefs in other disciplines (p. 169). Nevertheless, the ontological assumptions of RJM are less important than the epistemological assumptions because RJM is an epistemological model that seeks to understand how students acquire knowledge rather than a focus on the very nature of this knowledge. In other words, ontological foundations of RJM are secondary to epistemological foundations.

3.3.2.2 Epistemological assumptions of the reflective judgment model. RJM was developed from notions of critical thinking and reflective thinking as related to educational attainment, and is qualitatively structured (movement between stages is based on a qualitative assessment rather than a quantitative one), which has been adapted from Piaget's work on qualitatively different, invariant development models that assume placement in one given stage at a time (King & Kitchener, 1994, p. 24). The model also rests on the assumptions of the three levels of cognition put forward by Kitchener (1983): cognition (the pre-monitored cognitive processes on which knowledge of the world is built), metacognition (the cognitive processes invoked to monitor progress on cognitive tasks), and epistemic cognition (the limits of knowing, the certainty of knowing, and the criteria for knowing).

3.3.2.3 Reflective judgment model levels and stages. In an effort to better measure reflective thinking in learning, King & Kitchener (1994) proposed a three-level, seven-stage developmental progression for reflective judgment ability, linked to educational attainment, that would help to assess students' capacity for understanding uncertainty in knowledge. The model is a qualitative measure of the ability to reason through ill-structured problems. Critical thinking utilizes both structured and ill-structured problems. RJM looks at reflective thinking, which specifically measures how well a student reasons through ill-structured problems – defined as problems that do not have a single answer and represent real-world problem solving (*Ibid.*, p. 11) – and challenges students to consider their epistemic assumptions. These two facets distinguish reflective thinking from critical thinking (*Ibid.*, p. 8). The three levels of reflective judgment – pre-reflective thinking (comprised of stages 1, 2, and 3), quasi-reflective thinking (comprised of stages 4 and 5), and reflective thinking (comprised of stages 6 and 7) evolved from years of substantial research done by King, Kitchener, and others (King, 1977; Kitchener, 1978; Kitchener & King, 1981; Kitchener, 1983; Kitchener, King, Wood, & Davison, 1989; King, Kitchener, & Wood, 1990; Kitchener & King, 1990; King, 1992; Kitchener, Lynch, Fischer, & Wood, 1993).

Table 3.1 (page 43) (adapted from King & Kitchener, 1994) shows the type of reflective thinking evident at each stage. The first level, pre-reflective thinking, assumes that knowledge is gained by direct, personal observation, and problems are viewed and defined as mostly certain and complete. This level contains Stage 1 (knowledge is absolute and certain; beliefs need not be justified), Stage 2 (knowledge is obtained through the senses and remains certain; beliefs are given through an authority figure), and Stage 3 (knowledge may seem uncertain until it is obtained; beliefs are from either authorities or personal opinion). The second level, quasi-reflective thinking, shows that students differentiate between well-structured problems and ill-structured, and look at ill-structured problems with a degree of uncertainty, yet their grasp of the inherent ambiguity of ill-structured problems is still not evident. This level contains Stage 4 (knowledge is uncertain but claims are inconsistent and idiosyncratic; beliefs are also idiosyncratic), and Stage 5 (knowledge is contextual and subjective through a personal lens; beliefs are context specific

and sometimes delay conclusions). The third level, reflective thinking, represents the most advanced sets of (comparative and relational) assumptions students identify in solving ill-structured problems. This level contains Stage 6 (knowledge is constructed from conclusions made from a variety of sources; beliefs are justified through the comparison of evidence and opinions, and weighted against each other), and Stage 7 (knowledge is a process of reasonable inquiry against ill-structured problems; beliefs are justified probabilistically through interpretations of evidence, the interrelationship of alternative judgment consequences, the risk of erroneous conclusions, and the weight of evidence).

3.3.2.4 Reflective judgement model methods. The primary method used for assessing reflective thinking against the RJM is the reflective judgment interview (RJI). The RJI involves on the spot presentation of an ill-structured problem to the research participant. Once the participant has read the problem, standard probe questions linked to major RJM concepts are asked with the goal of eliciting data that can be rateable against the RJM (*Ibid.*, p. 100). The standard RJI involves the initial reading of a problem followed by a semi-structured interview in which the standard probe questions are used as prompts with follow up questions based on the researcher's perceived need for clarity or refocus of a response (*Ibid.*, p. 101). The standard probe questions and the procedures followed for the RJI are discussed in the research design section of this chapter, and the scoring procedures employed for this research are presented in the data analysis section of this chapter.

TABLE 3.1a: Reflective Judgment Stages 1, 2, & 3

Pre-Reflective Thinking (Stages 1, 2 and 3)

Stage 1		Stage 2		Stage 3	
<i>View of knowledge</i>	<i>Concept of justification</i>	<i>View of knowledge</i>	<i>Concept of justification</i>	<i>View of knowledge</i>	<i>Concept of justification</i>
Knowledge is assumed to exist absolutely and concretely; it is not understood as an abstraction. It can be obtained with certainty by direct observation.	Beliefs need no justification since there is assumed to be an absolute correspondence between what is believed to be true and what is true. Alternate beliefs are not perceived.	Knowledge is assumed to be absolutely certain or certain but not immediately available. Knowledge can be obtained directly through the senses (as in direct observation) or via authority figures.	Beliefs are unexamined and unjustified or justified by their correspondence with the beliefs of an authority figure (such as a teacher or parent). Most issues are assumed to have a right answer, so there is little or no conflict in making decisions about disputed issues.	Knowledge is assumed to be absolutely certain or temporarily uncertain. In areas of temporary uncertainty, only personal beliefs can be known until absolute knowledge is obtained. In areas of absolute certainty, knowledge is obtained from authorities.	In areas in which certain answers exist, beliefs are justified by reference to authorities' view. In areas in which answers do not exist, beliefs are defended as personal opinion since the link between evidence and beliefs is unclear.
<i>"I know what I have seen"</i>		<i>"If it is on the news, it has to be true."</i>		<i>"When there is evidence that people can give to convince everybody one way or another, then it will be knowledge; until then, it's just a guess."</i>	

Adapted from King and Kitchener (1994), p. 14-16

TABLE 3.1b: Reflective Judgment Stages 4 & 5

Quasi-Reflective Thinking (Stages 4 and 5)

Stage 4		Stage 5	
<i>View of knowledge</i>	<i>Concept of justification</i>	<i>View of knowledge</i>	<i>Concept of justification</i>
Knowledge is uncertain and knowledge claims are idiosyncratic to the individual since situational variables (such as incorrect reporting of data, data lost over time, or disparities in access to information) dictate that knowing always involves an element of ambiguity.	Beliefs are justified by giving reasons and using evidence, but the arguments and choice of evidence are idiosyncratic (for example, choosing evidence that fits an established belief).	Knowledge is contextual and subjective since it is filtered through a person's perceptions and criteria for judgment. Only interpretations of evidence, events, or issues may be known.	Beliefs are justified within a particular context by means of the rules of inquiry for that context and by context-specific interpretations of evidence. Specific beliefs are assumed to be context specific or are balanced against other interpretations, which complicates (and sometimes delays) conclusions.
<i>"I'd be more inclined to believe evolution if they had proof. It's just like the pyramids: I don't think we'll ever know. Who are you going to ask? No one was there."</i>		<i>"People think differently and so they attack the problem differently. Other theories could be as true as my own, but based on different evidence."</i>	

Adapted from King and Kitchener (1994), p. 14-16

TABLE 3.1c: Reflective Judgment Stages 6 & 7

Reflective Thinking (Stages 6 and 7)

Stage 6		Stage 7	
<i>View of knowledge</i>	<i>Concept of justification</i>	<i>View of knowledge</i>	<i>Concept of justification</i>
Knowledge is constructed into individual conclusions about illustrated problems on the basis of information from a variety of sources. Interpretations that are based on evaluations of evidence across contexts and on the evaluated opinions of reputable others can be known.	Beliefs are justified by comparing evidence and opinion from different perspectives on an issue or across different contexts and by constructing solutions that are evaluated by criteria such as the weight of the evidence, the utility of the solution, or the pragmatic need for action.	Knowledge is the outcome of a process of reasonable inquiry in which solutions to ill-structured problems are constructed. The adequacy of those solutions is evaluated in terms of what is most reasonable or probable according to the current evidence, and it is re-evaluated when relevant new evidence, perspectives, or tools of inquiry become available.	Beliefs are justified probabilistically on the basis of a variety of interpretive considerations, such as the weight of the evidence, the explanatory value of the interpretations, the risk of erroneous conclusions, consequences of alternative judgments, and the interrelationships of these factors. Conclusions are defended as representing the most complete, plausible, or compelling understanding of an issue not the basis of the available evidence.
<i>"It's very difficult in this life to be sure. There are degrees of sureness. You come to a point at which you are sure enough for a personal stance on the issue."</i>		<i>"One can judge an argument by how well thought-out the positions are, what kinds of reasoning and evidence are used to support it, and how consistent the way one argues on this topic is compared to other topics."</i>	

Adapted from King and Kitchener (1994), p. 14-16

3.3.3 Combining Phenomenography and the Reflective Judgment Model

Chapter 2 presented an argument as to the complementary nature of phenomenography and RJM in better understanding the learning lifeworld; phenomenography and RJM can be used together to deliver a more authentic and encompassing account of student's learning by using phenomenography to determine what has been learned, and using RJM to determine reflective thinking that can show a participant's epistemic cognition, which could further substantiate the authenticity of the interview content. Gauging the level of reflective thinking ability can also yield insight into students' ability to engage in critical reflection, which Mezirow (1998) linked directly to RJM in his article on critical reflection and TLT.

3.4 Research Design

This section describes the choices made in the design of the research, utilizing both phenomenography and RJM in the framing process. This section includes the data collection procedures, the participant recruitment and selection process, and the interview structure.

The choice of the regional academic travel programs to study also helped to shape the research design. The two regional academic travel programs chosen for this study, Engineers for Social Impact (EfSI) and the public health trip, were chosen because the two experiences represent two different disciplinary experiences (one engineering, one public health) in two different geographic locations (one in Sri Lanka, one in Ethiopia). The rationale for choosing these programs was to capture the variation of experience within each program and between the disparate programs in the Office of Global Education, which could have wider implications for the improvement of future regional academic travel programs.

3.4.1 Data Collection

3.4.1.1 Participant recruitment and selection. A total of 28 students attended the EfSI trip in March 2014; 14 students attended the March 2014 public health trip in Ethiopia. Students from these two groups formed the potential sample group for my study. Students were selected based on their answers to eight reflection questions the Office of Global Education

administered immediately upon their return from the regional academic travel trip. Anonymised responses to the reflection questions (respondents were assigned a particular number that allowed responses to different questions by the same person to be tracked) were reviewed utilizing intensity purposive sampling technique. Purposive sampling is a common sampling technique in qualitative research (Cohen, Mannion, & Morrison, 2011) and consists of the researcher choosing subjects based on certain characteristics of that subject; subjects are chosen based on meeting the needs of the researcher. Intensity sampling is a kind of purposive sampling in which individuals chosen represent clear examples of the issue in question (*Ibid.*, p. 157).

In determining sample size in phenomenographic research, the key is to conduct enough interviews to get a range of experiences. Cousin (2009) asserted that there is no set number of interviews required for phenomenographic research, but at least ten would be sensible (p. 192). Seidman (2013) pointed to two criteria in qualitative research for determining the number of participants in a study: sufficiency and saturation of information. He posited (similarly to Cousin) that there is no number that determines a good or bad study, only that which is enough to gather sufficient data. As for saturation of information, it is the point where the interviewer begins to hear the same information reported (*Ibid.*, p. 58). Reflection question responses were reviewed based on a simplified system utilizing three criteria: A response that showed *strong applicability* to this research, a response that showed *possible applicability* to this research, and a response that showed *no applicability* to this research. From this review, an initial group of twenty participants (ten from EfSI and ten from public health) were identified, and The Office of Global Education was contacted to provide email addresses for the twenty chosen participants in a random order.

Prospective participants were contacted by email requesting their involvement in the study. A participant information sheet (see Appendix C) and a personalized consent form (see Appendix D) were attached to each invitation email. At the end of the invitation process, fourteen participants (seven from EfSI, seven from public health) agreed to be a part of the research.

Students were interviewed six to eight months following the regional academic travel trip. The interview timings were constrained by the ethics approval process from both University of Liverpool and NYU Abu Dhabi. While there was no deliberate choice around this timing, there were both challenges and benefits to the timing of interviews. The biggest challenge was students properly recalling their experience given the passage of time. However, this time delay could also be considered a benefit. Students would be able to show how much of the experience has been incorporated into their academic and personal lives. Rowan-Kenyon & Niehaus (2011) found in their study that what happens after a student returns from a short-term study abroad experience is just as important as the experience itself.

3.4.1.2 Interview structure. Interviews were expected to last approximately 60 minutes, beginning with the phenomenographic interview immediately followed by the reflective judgment interview (RJI). Twelve of the fourteen interviews took place in person on the campus of NYU Abu Dhabi, and two interviews took place via private video conferencing. All interviews took place in a private setting, usually in a conference room or in a private office. Both sections of the interview followed a semi-structured interview format in which initial standard questions were asked with the opportunity for open-ended follow-up questions based on specific participant responses to gather more in-depth responses. Interviews were audio recorded upon verbal and written confirmation from the student. At this stage, participants were identified on the audio recording by a three- or four-digit number as a means of tracking.

3.4.1.2.1 Phenomenographic interview questions. Interview questions for the first part of the interview were informed by the literature and designed based on the research aims utilizing Bowden's (2000) suggestions for how to conduct a phenomenographic interview. Open-ended follow up questions such as 'could you explain that further?' and 'what do you mean by that?' or other questions that attempted to follow the student's line of thinking were used (*Ibid.*, p. 10).

The first part of this portion of the interview was used to gather some basic background information from each student. The initial structured questions asked were:

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- *How many countries have you visited and stayed for longer than 1 week?*
- *What was the purpose of travel to these countries?*
- *What country (or countries) are your roommates from?*
- *Was the Regional Academic Travel to Ethiopia (or Sri Lanka) your first Regional Academic Travel experience at NYUAD?*
- *If it was not your first Regional Academic Travel experience, what was your first experience?*

The next set of questions asked students to reflect on their expectations and experiences before, during, and after the regional academic travel trip. Questions asked included:

- *Can you tell me more specifically about your Regional Academic trip to [Sri Lanka or Ethiopia]?*
- *What impression of the experience did you have prior to going on the trip?*
- *What was required of you during the trip?*
 - *Were you required to keep a journal? If so, can you elaborate on what you wrote about your experience?*
 - *Was there a structured assignment or assignments that you had to complete?*
- *To what extent did participation in that trip affect you as a student? In other words, did you come away from the experience feeling the same or different as before you went on the trip?*
- *What was the most rewarding part of your Regional Academic Travel experience?*
- *What was the most challenging part of your experience?*
- *Consider your worldview before you took this trip, and now consider your worldview after this trip. Is there a difference?*

3.4.1.2.2 Reflective judgment interview. Once the phenomenographic interview questions were completed, students were presented with the following ill-structured problem:

Some experts believe climate change is a much more serious issue than others do. Some studies point to man-made factors such as the burning of fossil fuels and deforestation, while others point to normal temperature fluctuations and natural processes. Some experts claiming human activity is more a cause are pushing for immediate action in order to avoid dire consequences, while other experts assert that human activity is not significant enough to change the earth's climate, and that climate change is based on bunk science and scare tactics. (adapted from <http://climatechange.procon.org>)

Students were given five minutes to review the problem after which the following standard RJI questions were asked:

- *What do you think about these statements?*
- *How did you come to that point of view?*
- *On what do you base that point of view?*
- *Can you ever know for sure that your position on this issue is correct? How or why not?*
- *When two people differ about matters such as this, is it the case that one opinion is right and one is wrong?*
- *How is it possible that people have such different points of view about this subject?*
- *How is it possible that experts in the field disagree about this subject?*

(King & Kitchener, 1994, pp. 102-103)

In accordance with the standard RJI, open-ended follow-up questions to obtain more information were asked where clarification was required.

3.5 Data Analysis

Once the interviews were completed, data collected were transcribed by a third-party transcription service. Written transcriptions received were then reviewed at least two times each for accuracy against the audio recordings to ensure the transcripts were recorded verbatim. Next, the transcripts were separated into two general files: one containing all of the phenomenographic interviews and one containing the RJIs. The identifying number from the audio recording was retained in each document for the purposes of identifying participants during the analysis stage. This number has been changed to a letter-number combination – the letter E for an engineering student and the letter P for a public health student and a number from 1 to 7 (e.g. Student E4 or Student P1) – when referencing an individual in this thesis.

The data analysis for this research involved three general steps. The first step analysed the data compiled from the phenomenographic interviews. The second step involved a separate analysis of data compiled from the RJI. The third step applied results from the RJI to the results of the phenomenographic analysis. The process followed for each of these three steps is discussed below.

3.5.1 Phenomenographic Analysis

One of the key differences between phenomenographic research and other qualitative research is the process followed during the analysis stage. Some phenomenographic researchers emphasize the need to remain open to meanings ensuring presuppositions and premature closures are kept at bay to allow for categories to emerge from the analysis process (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000; Bowden, 2000). However, others stress the need to co-constitute meaning and structure as a way to fully appreciate the meaning of a particular utterance (Marton, 1986; Åkerlind, 2005). For this initial process, I chose an approach combining Bowden's (2000) approach of adopting the whole transcript approach of looking for meanings in the context of the entire account, Ashworth & Lucas's (2000) three-step process – developed from research by Lucas (1998) – of creating individual profiles, developing themes, and finally arriving at categories of description, and Åkerlind's (2005)

suggestion to find structure in the meanings after an initial general search for meaning. Bowden's (2000) approach, combined with Åkerlind's (2005) suggestions, ensured fidelity to the context of the data, whilst Ashworth & Lucas's (2000) three-steps offered both an overview and detail of the student lifeworld (p. 305).

The file containing all phenomenographic transcripts was uploaded to NVivo software and the entire file was read three times to begin to extract contextualized meanings. An important step in this process was not to focus on individual words or phrases, but to extract meanings from larger individual accounts, and in turn begin to see how these meanings relate to the entirety of the data. The next step involved reading individual transcripts and developing a profile based on the answers received from the initial questions during the interview. The creation of individual profiles, comprising one written side of an A4 piece of paper was modelled on Lucas's (1998) research, and comprised key foci of students' learning experiences. According to Lucas, "the individual profile is a necessary background against which the meanings of quotations will be viewed. This provides a necessary counter-weight to any tendency to attribute meaning out of context" (p. 138). These foci attempt to capture the emphasis of each interview, and can show consistency across interviews in certain areas.

Once the profiles were created, larger passages were read and began to be coded using a descriptive coding technique, which summarized a passage into a word or short phrase that described the passage's basic topic (Saldaña, 2012, p. 88). This ensured maintaining openness to meanings in the context of individual accounts when first reviewing the transcripts. Attention was paid not to invoke any categorical limitations at this point, however some patterns began to emerge across individual responses, and were coded similarly to one another. These patterns were then compared to the foci from the individual profiles to determine consistency. In the second cycle, which utilized pattern coding – defined as "a category label that identifies similarly coded data" (*Ibid.*, p. 266) – the patterns that emerged were viewed in relation to one another and grouped constituting the content of the categories of description. The establishment of themes represented the point where Marton's (1986) *pools of meaning* concept began to emerge, and

signalled where the structure around the pools of meaning gave way to the development of thematic categories, or categories of description. The development of these categories is additionally supported by Saldaña's (2012) second-cycle coding technique of pattern coding. For the purposes of this research, this process is termed *phenomenographic pattern coding*, which combined the pattern coding technique with phenomenographic analysis leading ultimately to the final cycle comprised of a working outcome space where the categories of description were considered in logical relationship to one another, thereby establishing conceptions.

3.5.1.1 NVivo software usage. Qualitative analysis software can be a powerful tool for managing and analysing a host of different source documents. The advantage of using this software is that codes are automatically color-coded to easily view different codes across the data. This research utilized NVivo for Mac as a tool to review the interview data. Verbatim transcripts were uploaded to the system, and then codes began to be placed on the data. This made the second cycle pattern coding much easier by allowing similarly-coded data to be placed under a larger thematic code. Also, word queries were easy to perform to see language patterns, and usage of certain language that could reveal patterns across the data.

3.5.2 Reflective Judgment Interview Scoring

Once an RJI is completed, data are typically scored independently by two raters who assign a score between 1 and 7 corresponding to the level in the RJM for which the response fits best. Independent scoring ensures reliability of the scores determined. These scores are then reported as a three-digit code (King & Kitchener, 1994, pp. 264-265). For example, if a student receives a score of 4 on five of the seven responses, and a score of 3 on two of the seven, the score will be reported as 3-4-4, using the more prevalent score in repetition. It is rare that scores go across more than two consecutive stages (*Ibid.*). In this research, my thesis supervisor served as the second rater of the RJI transcripts. Once we individually rated all of the transcripts, utilizing Table 3.1 as a guide for determining the appropriate stage for each response, we engaged in a thorough dialogue comparing our scoring choices, and arrived at a consensus score. This adapted scoring approach is

based on Saldaña's (2012) concept of *dialogical intersubjectivity*, which allows researchers to dispense with quantitative measures in a review team based on intensive group discussion and simple group consensus as an agreement goal in qualitative research (p. 35).

3.5.3 Comparing Reflective Judgement Interview Scores Against Conceptions

Once phenomenographic analysis was completed, and conceptions were developed in the outcome space, a chart comprised of individual students, the instances of conceptions they held and their RJM stage was created. Passages from themes making up the conceptions were compared against RJI passages to analyse reflective thinking in the phenomenographic accounts. This analytic approach is supported by phenomenographic research who point to a lack of a prescribed approach in phenomenography, which limits predetermined views or drawing conclusions too quickly (Prosser, 2010; Yates et al., 2012).

3.6 Validity and Reliability

Determining the validity of a study is necessary to signal that certain considerations have been made to ensure that the research has been carried out in a justifiable way. Validity is akin to addressing mitigating factors in risk assessment; all risks might not be mitigated, but if key issues are covered and addressed, risk is significantly diminished. Validity acts as a kind of mitigation of the risks of research by offering justifications for choices made in the research process. Validity and reliability of RJM was addressed above through the discussion of the epistemological assumptions, the RJI methods, and the scoring methods, thereby demonstrating construct validity. Kelly (2002) described construct validity as "full and accurate reporting of all aspect of processes of interviewing and analysis to allow examination and replication" (Construct Validity section, para. 1). In addition to construct validity, RJM has the benefit of a high level of interrater reliability (King & Kitchener, 1994, p. 114). Thus, the remainder of this section will be devoted to discussion validity and reliability in phenomenographic research.

3.6.1 Validity

Åkerlind (2005) discussed two kinds of validity in phenomenographic research, communicative and pragmatic. In communicative validity, the search for defensible interpretation takes precedence over the precise interpretation. This defence can take the form of review and approval by a research community. In the case of this research, communicative validity consists of the research community of my doctoral colleagues and faculty who critiqued this work at University of Liverpool's Ed.D. thesis residency, the ethics panels both at University of Liverpool and NYU Abu Dhabi to whom I needed to defend and provide rationale for my research design, and my thesis supervisors. The other kind of validity, pragmatic validity, requires the validation of outcomes that have produced effective ways of operating. Pragmatic validity is not feasible for this study, as the findings have not yet officially been shared with the Office of Global Education. Within the communicative validity paradigm, the intended audience for the findings can act as a way to measure validity, but it is not necessary.

Ashworth & Lucas (1998) stressed the need for bracketing – that is, the declaration of ones presuppositions about the research being performed – as a necessary part of phenomenographic research on the lifeworld. They recommended that literature searching should take place after analysis to be able to listen without presupposition to what the participant is saying about their lifeworld (p. 421). The presuppositions about theories and the research questions that were brought to this research have been directly addressed in the first chapter, but bear repeating here for validity purposes. Before the data was collected, readings on phenomenography and reflective judgment helped to shape research questions, but most of this work was around developing the methodology for this study and not focused on prejudicing the results. Regarding the object of study, research on STSA and study abroad was performed after analysis and therefore were not involved in colouring the data collection in any way, which could be considered a unique feature of this study. With respect to the intended discussion on transformative learning, research on TLT was done before the data collection process, and could be seen as an interpretive lens in which I was hoping to discuss the findings.

However, this hypothesis of transformative learning is an interpretive lens on which the research rests. Ashworth & Lucas (2000) admitted that complete suspension of presuppositions through bracketing is very difficult, but it is up to the researcher to be as explicit as possible about choices made, and how bracketing has been achieved (p. 307).

Additionally, Lucas (1998), in discussing the importance of individual profiles in phenomenographic research on lifeworlds, points to these profiles as a kind of internal validity, which refers to the consistency of the participant's account. This kind of validity is dependent upon the extent of reflection from the participant, the appropriateness of interview questions, and a lack of trust between the interviewer and the participant (p. 138). For this research, students reflected well on their experience given the interviews were conducted 6-8 months after the trip, and the interview data showed the interview questions and trust with participants did not seem to be an issue.

My position in this research has been presented in the first chapter (page 5), and it is important to reiterate that I have had little to no experience with the Office of Global Education before this research study, yet I was generally aware of the work being done. I made every attempt to suspend my knowledge – however general – of the activities of the Office of Global Education, and of these regional academic travel trips. Once I engaged with the Office, I had a couple of meetings with the head of the Office, which led me to establish this research project, but I did not receive any other information from the head on details of these trips.

In sum, validity for the phenomenographic research in this study uses a communicative validity approach, with a reliance on bracketing presuppositions (including my own) as clearly as possible to ensure choices are justified and research is considered valid.

3.6.2 Reliability

Sandberg (1997) rejected the notion that interjudge reliability in phenomenographic research is defensible (pp. 205-208). The process of relying on multiple readers of phenomenographic research data is flawed in that it shifts the faithful accounting of research participants to multiple and inconsistent perspectives. This is especially troubling in phenomenographic

research that is attempting to utilize phenomenological epistemologies (i.e. lifeworld) since the focus moves from participants' conception of reality to interjudge reliability. Instead, declaration of the researcher's interpretative awareness, including all biases toward the data, is important to claim research reliability. Similar to the claims of validity in the previous section, the need to bracket is key in research reliability. Sandberg (*Ibid.*) suggests using phenomenological reduction (circumventing certain kinds of pre-definition) in the interpretive space of phenomenographic research. This five-step process entails: a. researcher orientation to the phenomenon as and how it appears, b. always describing the phenomenon in the context of the individual experience, c. horizontalization, or treating all aspects of the lived experience as equally important, d. a search for structural features, and e. using intentionality as a correlational rule (p. 210). For this research, the orientation of the researcher is described in the positioning section of the first chapter and kept in mind throughout the entirety of the project; description of the phenomenon in the context of individual experience is a necessary condition of this research given the aims of *accessing the learning lifeworld*; horizontalization has been achieved in the analysis by treating each individual account and each response with the same level of importance consistent with treating the phenomenographic data as a whole object; the search for structural features, as mentioned above, was done through pattern coding once the search for meanings took place in the first cycle of coding the data; and intentionality is built into the analytic process through the initial construction of an individual profile, followed by the development of themes, and finishing with categories of description.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Rossman and Rallis (2010) wrote about the bureaucratization of moral reasoning with researchers doing only what is necessary and required of their ethics applications. They argue that more could be done beyond the cursory review of an Institutional Review Board (IRB), with a particular emphasis on evaluating trustworthiness through the reliance on procedural rules. To go beyond the necessary procedural rules, reflexivity in the research ethics process is necessary. Greenbank (2003) pointed out that only adhering to

minimum standards of ethics discourages researchers from reflecting and working out for themselves what is needed in certain circumstances (p. 798).

The ethics process for both the University of Liverpool and NYU Abu Dhabi required a rationale for the project structure including justifications of the sample size chosen, inclusion and exclusion criteria, and the process followed to recruit participants. The required process for each school was thorough, and during this time my thesis supervisors stressed a more reflexive approach to ethics. Approval letters (including approved amendments) from the Virtual Programme Research Ethics Committee at the University of Liverpool and the institutional review board at NYU Abu Dhabi are attached to this thesis as Appendix A and Appendix B, respectively.

A declaration of the potential risks and benefits for participants was required. At first thought, there appeared to be little to no risks, and little perceived benefit to participants. As supervisors provided feedback, and feedback was received from the ethics committee, I realised that there were both risks and benefits that were not initially taken into account. The key risk in the research was the potential stress students could experience when discussing their experience on the regional academic travel trips. These trips comprised visits to impoverished areas in Sri Lanka and Ethiopia; the trip to Sri Lanka involved the building of houses and working with a rural community to address infrastructure issues; and the trip to Ethiopia involved visiting a social centre, as well as two clinics: one clinic treated advanced tuberculosis patients, and the other treated people stricken with Hansen's disease (also known as Leprosy). Students' sensitivities with these experiences have to be considered, and efforts to explicitly address these sensitivities were reflected on the participant information sheet (please see Appendix C). Students were given contact information for counselling services if the interview evoked any stress. There was an initial perception of minimal risk of undue stress, as students were asked to reflect on their learning experiences during the trip. Yet reflecting on this risk, the realization that interviews, even about seemingly benign subjects, could have risks and need to be accounted for in both the procedural documents, and in practice. Guillemin & Gillam (2004) argued that reflexivity is necessary during all stages in the research process, and in particular during the development of ethical considerations in an effort

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to reflect how their research might affect participants before conducting research (p. 277). Ethical reflexivity, initially demanded by the thesis supervisors, was welcomed and allowed for a more thorough evaluation of ethics issues for this research.

Other general ethical considerations involve the protection of data. As mentioned in the research design section, data was audio recorded with participant's permission. Audio recordings used a numerical identifier for purposes of tracking individual transcripts, and a separate identifier was used in the reporting of research to ensure no identifiable data has been included.

Access to participants was granted by NYU Abu Dhabi's Office of Global Education and described in the section above on participant selection and recruitment. As per ethical requirements, students were contacted using their New York University email addresses. Contact with potential participants was made using my New York University email address in an effort to fully declare my position both in this research, and at the University.

Chapter 4 – Research Results

This chapter reports research findings from the process of data collection and analysis presented in the previous chapter. This chapter, divided into four sections, begins with a section reporting the results of phenomenographic analysis, including a presentation of individual profiles and key foci from the profiles, leading into the development of themes, leading to the categories of description derived and the outcome space in which these categories become conceptions. The second section reports results from scoring the RJI. The third section matches conceptions of individual students to the corresponding RJI scores, leading into the fourth and final section presenting a summary of findings. The structure of reporting the results in this way is consistent with the methodological discussion that took place in Chapter 3

4.1 Results of Phenomenographic Analysis

A key question explored in this research was “What are the qualitatively different ways students experience particular regional academic travel trips at NYU Abu Dhabi?” As presented in the previous chapter (page 51-52), a combined approach utilizing Bowden’s (2000) analysis techniques emphasizing using the whole transcript at all times, combined with Åkerlind’s (2005) suggestions for remaining open to meanings by not structuring categories too early or too late in the process, and Ashworth & Lucas’s (2000) three-step process of presenting individual profiles, followed by themes, and finally developing categories of description. This ensured both a proper exploration of learning lifeworlds, and fidelity to a phenomenographic approach. It is this latter, three-step process that guided the reporting of results below.

4.1.1 Individual Profiles

Lucas (1998) utilized individual profiles to identify the most salient aspects and the areas of focus or emphasis for each participant in her research (p. 125). This became the basis for Ashworth & Lucas’s (2000) recommendation to create individual profiles as the first part of the three-step process in analysing phenomenographic data. Student interview responses

were read and information was compiled on one side of an A4 piece of paper that composed key aspects of a student's experience.

Table 4.1 presents general profile information for each student. The year in school field corresponds to the year of study (based on the U.S. system of four years of undergraduate study) at the time of the interview, which took place six to eight months following the regional academic travel trip. Student on the EfSI trip were engineering majors whilst students on the public health trip were from various disciplines, including the sciences and social sciences. Six of the fourteen students had been on a prior travel trip with the Office of Global Education, while the experience discussed for this research was the first trip for eight students.

TABLE 4.1: Student Participant Profiles

No	<u>Year in school (YIS)</u>	<u>YIS trip taken</u>	<u>Area of Study</u>	<u>First Trip?</u>	<u>If Not, which instance?</u>
E1	Graduated	4	Engineering	No	4 th
E2	2	1	Engineering	Yes	
E3	4	3	Engineering	Yes	
E4	2	1	Engineering	Yes	
E5	2	1	Engineering	Yes	
E6	Graduated	4	Engineering	No	2 nd
E7	2	1	Engineering	Yes	
P1	2	1	Science	Yes	
P2	2	1	Science	No	2 nd
P3	Graduated	4	Science	No	3 rd
P4	2	1	Science	Yes	
P5	2	1	Social Science	No	2 nd
P6	2	1	Social Science	Yes	
P7	Grad	4	Social Science	No	3 rd

Individual profiles identified key aspects of students' experiences. Key foci emerged from individual accounts or across several accounts. These foci show the regional academic travel trip offered a learning experience that:

- had "real world" impact;
- opened up new learning opportunities
- induced self-reflection; and
- invoked similarities to one's home country.

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At least one of these foci showed up in each individual student account. Most students talked about how their experience had more impact than they expected. Also, most students saw something in the experience that they could relate to their home country, which gave them a feeling that the world was smaller than they thought.

4.1.1.1 “Real world” impact. Student E1, in discussing how the regional academic travel trip affected his experience as a student at NYU Abu Dhabi, talked about the relationships he formed with villagers in such a short period of time.

“...because initially I thought to really bring a huge impact, you have to be this big player but what I realized is that, you just need to do a small part and when everyone does small parts...or small acts, small pieces of work, they can have huge impacts.” (E1)

When asked specifically about how his learning was affected, he said,

“It was the beginning of feeling that, at least what I am learning has real impact on the world.” (Ibid.)

Student P1 also expressed the opportunity to make an impact, yet his interests were focused on research impact in science and community development, rather than a more personal impact expressed by his colleagues. He said if he were working individually, he would have done a report more research-focused so that community leaders could look at the science of diseases alongside the social science of community development.

Student P3 also talked about working in public health to advance impact in her community:

“And I also wanted to help, like I want to be on the other side and try to improve these services.” (P3)

Student E5 expressed his ability to impact a real situation and how it affected his overall learning experience at the university:

“It’s cliché to say you come back a different person but you come back a different person...It really changed how I view the practical side of engineering and that’s the beauty of these kind of trips.” (E5)

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Student E5 saw the impact of the trip both as a student and as a person, which gave him a new dimension of learning. Student P7 saw the regional academic travel trip as both a way to understand how small-scale and large-scale development projects differ, and an unexpected moment of networking with UN officials:

“I had a chance to meet a woman who had worked at UNDP...I hope to work at UNDP...And it’s really interesting because she was like, “Oh, you want to work there.” It was a difference in perspective because I’m sort of new to the field, I’m excited and she had the perspective that what big organizations like UNDP do is really, really different from sort of micro-level project that you’re doing.” (P7)

There are a number of different ways the “real world” impact could have a focus, and the above are just a few examples of some impacts students felt they have had as a result of their trip. Impact as a general concept will appear again in the descriptive data analysis later in this chapter.

4.1.1.2. New learning opportunities. Not unlike Student P1, Student P2, also a science major, showed an increased interest in social sciences from the public health trip. She went as far to say that she would change her academic trajectory as a result of the trip:

“it definitely increased my interest in public health. So if there was a minor or major here or more courses offered in public health, I would definitely take it.” (P2)

Student P2 enrolled in a public health independent study course, which showed that the trip had a direct effect on her academic career. Similarly, Student P3, who had always been interested in public health, sought to change her academic trajectory:

“And this of course is relevant to me right now because I’m studying medicine, I want to do this for the rest of my life. I never want to see somebody and assume, oh, it’s x, y, z. So I am currently taking courses on how to do that as well formally in health care. So it really affected how aware I choose to be, if that makes sense.” (P3)

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Some students were not as specific or focused as the above students, but still recognized that there was some effect on learning:

“So of course there’s a part of my learning that was affected by this, of course. But you can’t really say like, ‘I want to change a degree now.’”

(E4)

Student E4 did not connect theory to practice as much as others did on the EfSI trip. Her responses intimated an expectation akin to a vacation rather than a learning experience, but she was quite surprised that there was a lot of physical work. Similarly, Student P4 generally felt disconnected from the experience because she felt there was a lot of giving on the part of the local population and not as much giving by her and her classmates. Nevertheless, she still saw value in the trip getting her away from her perceived uniformity of thinking in the classrooms of NYU Abu Dhabi:

“Classroom atmospheres are very safe and that’s why this trip was so important to me I guess because it was outside of my comfort zone...And I feel like that’s necessary, especially in an environment like NYU Abu Dhabi where people come from different places but oftentimes they have very similar opinions.” (P4)

Student P5, connected the work he was doing in class at the time of the interview directly to the regional academic travel trip he had taken nearly six months prior:

“...we visited the hospital twice, pre and post-surgery, and there -- you form this emotional attachment to the patient, you talk to them before the surgery, and now you come back and see them transformed and very happy...oh, we just learned this term at social psychology yesterday -- this sort of partial elimination of active observer bias whereas if we were observers like I thought we will be, it would be more of a deductive experience.” (P5)

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Whilst both of these trips were quite short in duration, some students came back and actively changed their academic careers, thereby affecting their future choice of profession. In addition to the learning connection to their studies, there was also learning that took place on an emotional level. Responses to questions about learning yielded answers that were more affective in nature. Some of these responses include:

“When we’re there and we’re experiencing this, we feel bad or we feel pity, and we shouldn’t. It’s not that it should be pitiful, it should be that we should go out there and we should feel like what if we’re living in these conditions. We would want someone to help.” (E6)

Self-reflection. Student P5 talked about how the work that he and his student team did induced self-reflection with the local people they were interviewing. He recalls:

“I think [we] made these people sort of induce self-reflection, and individual awareness in these patients. And so they looked back at their life and they sort of -- as they were in this really shocking and tragic life experience -- it induced self-consciousness and self-awareness of where they are and what they are doing.” (E5)

This response showed maturity in thinking from Student E5, and I went on to ask him if he engaged in self-reflection. He responded:

“Oh, well, I guess it induced reversed self-reflection” (Ibid.)

This caused him to laugh at his term *reversed self-reflection* because the self-reflection he recorded from the Ethiopian people caused him to reflect on his own experience. He went on to describe how NYU Abu Dhabi has a culture that “forces us to self-reflect a lot,” (*Ibid.*) in an effort to think about one’s place in the world.

4.1.1.4 Similarities to one's home country. Students who took part in this research came from a number of different countries of origin, some of which were compared by the student to the experience they had in Ethiopia or Sri Lanka. For example, Student E2 spoke of some key similarities he saw to his home country:

“And all similarities were the same construction materials, the way they coped with water runoff in the hills which is a big problem, communication between people. Those are wonderful similarities because I remember being with my dad in one of the mountainous regions [of my home country] and they were just have such a very tight knit community and this is what happened [in Sri Lanka].” (E2)

Student E2 also expressed some differences, including the fact that in Sri Lanka, different classes of people interacted with one another, which he never experienced in his home country.

Student P1, expressed surprise in the similarities between his country and Ethiopia:

“I found many, many similarities between Ethiopia and [my home country] while being there and that's something that really surprised me to be honest with you. I never thought that two geographically isolated places could actually share so many similar dynamics in how vibrant the cities were, or some of the challenges that we were facing.” (P1)

Student E4 also expressed the similarities between Sri Lanka and her home country:

“Well it was kind of like -- when you grew up in an environment and you think, ‘Okay, there's worse.’ But it's very hard to see -- I saw the reflection of my own society in that area. Does that make sense? So it's kind of like, ‘Okay, you're not so special after all.’” (E4)

In addition to the students who found similarities, there were also students who experienced a marked difference to their home country. Student P2 expressed this difference twice:

"I saw conditions that I probably would never be able to see in my own country... I have travelled mostly around Europe and... I don't want to use improper word here, but maybe slightly more developed, and so that was shocking to me that once we got [to Ethiopia it] was -- to me it seemed like there is absolutely nothing." (P2)

The recognition of similarities, along with the other three key foci, were developed during the compilation of individual profiles. This compilation, along with the first cycle descriptive coding process undertaken on the entirety of data, led to the establishment of themes developed during the next stage of analysis.

4.1.2 Development of Themes

During the review of transcripts, and through the expansion of the key foci developed from individual profiles, themes began to emerge that were prevalent enough to warrant notation as a possible theme in the data. During this process, 23 themes were developed from the descriptive coding of data, where short phrases were created around topics (Saldaña, 2012, p. 88). Table 4.2 presents the results of an iterative review yielding a list and short description of each theme. Themes such as *exploring new academic experiences*, the themes focused around impact, and *discovering similarity* were developed from the individual profile foci, whilst other themes such as *teamwork*, *experiential problem solving*, *discovering innovation*, and *connecting the classroom experience to the regional academic travel experience* emerged through the descriptive coding process; themes including *change in approach to assignment*, *before the experience*, and *change in worldview* were developed from questions asked during the interview process; and finally, the themes of *practice implications*, *transformative learning keywords or sentiments*, *change*, *communication*, *learning*, and *opportunities* emerged from the data analysis in the context of the research questions for this project.

TABLE 4.2: Themes Developed from Descriptive Coding

<u>Theme</u>	<u>Description</u>
<i>change in approach to assignment</i>	For any required assignments during the trip, instances where there was a change in approach to the originally planned approach.
<i>connecting the classroom to the regional academic travel experience</i>	Does the student mention an aspect of the regional academic travel experience that relates to classroom experience, or vice versa?
<i>experiential problem solving</i>	How is the experience helping students to connect to familiar or new ways of solving problems?
<i>teamwork</i>	The importance of working with others, including fellow students, local citizens, or hospital/NGO staff.
<i>academic impact</i>	The impact of regional academic travel trip on academic choices.
<i>exploring new academic experiences</i>	The ability to explore a new area of study during or as a result of the regional academic travel trip.
<i>discovering innovation</i>	Discovering innovative strategies, sometimes without the expected tools of innovation (such as advanced technological equipment or digital tools).
<i>personal impact</i>	Impact of regional academic travel trip on personal life.
<i>discovering similarity</i>	Finding similarity in experience or in a problem where there may have been a preconceived expectation of difference.
<i>engaging difference</i>	Encountering cultural difference and engaging with it in a meaningful way.
<i>learning differences</i>	New/alternative/unexpected ways of learning within assignments required during the trip.
<i>change in worldview</i>	Passages that indicated change in how a student views their world or outlook on life.
<i>impact of experience</i>	A student understanding the impact he or she has within the experience, or the impact the experience has had on her or him.
<i>impact on community or world</i>	How the student has had impact on the community or "the world" (used in general to mean they are doing good in general) as a result of the regional academic travel trip.
<i>scope of impact</i>	Student discusses experience based on efforts they have made as individuals or in relation to a larger entity.
<i>practice implications</i>	Student feedback or comments that could be used as recommendations for future regional academic travel trips.
<i>before the experience</i>	The point of view students expressed before they went to the host country.
<i>first time</i>	Instances of experiencing something for the first time whilst on the regional academic travel trip.
<i>transformative learning keywords or sentiments</i>	Sentiments or Keywords such as "shocking", "eye-opening", "game changer", and some cases of the word "difference" that indicated a possible transformative learning experience.
<i>change</i>	Instances of the word "change" indicating a notable quote.
<i>communication</i>	Instances of the word "communication" indicating a notable quote.
<i>learning</i>	Instances of the word "learning" indicating a notable quote.
<i>opportunities</i>	Instances of the word "opportunities" indicating a notable quote.

4.1.3 Categories of Description

Themes were then reviewed for patterns using the pattern coding technique. As a result, patterns were not evident across themes, which led to some themes not becoming part of the categories of description that are listed below. Through the pattern coding of themes as described in the previous chapter (page 53), the following four categories of description are revealed. Each category is comprised of the second stage analysis themes. To show reference of how these categories and themes emerged, each category will be presented with its constituent themes, and direct passages from the student data will be presented as evidence of thematic and categorical pertinence. This process of linking themes into categories developed from different stages of analysis – in other words, key foci developed from individual profiles were grouped with themes developed from descriptive coding, and themes developed in the context of the research questions and the interview questions – produced further evidence of capturing the individual experience and the collective experience, which could lead to more insight into the learning lifeworld consistent with the approach laid out by Lucas (1998) and Ashworth & Lucas (2000). The four categories developed are:

- Regional academic travel as experience that either supplements or complements classroom learning.
- Regional academic travel as experience that develops academic skills.
- Regional academic travel as experience that affects students' future academic, personal, and professional endeavours.
- Regional academic travel as experience that allows students to see themselves in the world.

4.1.3.1 Category: Regional academic travel as experience that either supplements or complements classroom learning. This category emerged from the themes of *connecting the classroom experience to the regional academic travel experience*, *change of approach to assignment, learning*, and *exploring new academic experiences*. Figure 4.1 below shows the category and the themes embedded in this category. Interview passages supporting each theme in their categorical context are presented below.

FIGURE 4.1: Category - Supplementing/Complementing Classroom Learning and Constituent Themes

Regional academic travel as experience that either supplements or complements classroom learning	<i>connecting the classroom experience to the regional academic travel experience</i> - Does the student mention an aspect of the regional academic travel experience that relates to classroom experience, or vice versa?
	<i>change in approach to assignment</i> - For any required assignments during the trip, instances where there was a change in approach to the originally planned approach.
	<i>learning</i> - Instances of the word "learning" indicating a notable quote.
	<i>exploring new academic experiences</i> - The ability to explore a new area of study during or as a result of the regional academic travel trip.

4.1.3.1.1 Connecting the classroom experience to the regional academic travel experience. This theme emerged partially from the descriptive coding process and from a question asked during the interview about the how the regional academic travel experience affected the student's overall academic experience at NYU Abu Dhabi. Student P1 spoke of how the trip added a new dimension of learning above what was learned in the classroom:

"...it is definitely a must, going to these places and actually being able to experience what you've been learning and not just leave it [to] written theory like it is in most of the cases." (P1)

Student E2 explained his experience more fully than Student P1 regarding his experience with regional academic travel versus his classroom experience:

"I feel like, at least engineering trips, have actually helped in applying what they teach in a class. At least one of the basic foundation classes, they teach all the practical stuff, the equations, the theories behind it. And to be honest, a lot of people would just get through it to get through it. But in this trip we actually applied some things that were taught in Physics per se." (E2)

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Similarly, Student P4 expressed the need to get out of her “comfort zone” in the classroom setting:

“Classroom atmospheres are very safe and that’s why this trip was so important to me I guess because it was outside of my comfort zone. So it made me, I guess, deal with more existential questions then had I been sitting in the classroom.” (P4)

These examples show the dimension of variation within the theme of connection to the classroom and evidence a strong link to this category of description. The next themes in this category helped to produce evidence of the emergence of this category directly from the data.

4.1.3.1.2 Change in approach to assignment. This theme is based on a prepared question that was asked during each interview about the change in approach taken toward the completion of any structured assignment during the regional academic travel trip.

Whilst other students didn’t directly link the change in assignment to their classroom learning, students such as Student E6 and Student P3 changed their approach to the structured assignment to supplement their classroom learning, either through action or through additional reading. Student E6, who was looking at water quality, wanted to take action and start a project upon returning to Abu Dhabi that was linked to the preparation of the final presentation:

“I brought this up at end of my presentation as well that, “Let’s start this. Let’s push for this.” (E6)

Student P3 took the opportunity to do more research on public health, which led to a change in assignment during the trip:

“...I was assigned to look at clubfoot cases and I presented before we went to see a surgery in the orthopaedic hospital, so I went back and read more on it. Instead of just an overview of ‘this is what clubfoot is,’ I looked at some techniques to try to buff it up, and also some statistics about the prevalence, the actual prevalence versus the recorded. So I did go back and re-do it.” (P3)

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This theme related to the completion of assignments during the travel trip offered a good link to how students were either directly or indirectly connecting the regional academic travel experience to their classroom learning experiences at NYU Abu Dhabi.

4.1.3.1.3 Learning. This theme was developed given the focus of this research on learning as it relates to the learning lifeworld. The general term *learning*, and the related terms *learn* or *learned*, were searched in the data without any other expectations of results other than to see the instances of students' usage of this word in their responses. Some of the resulting responses show the variation of responses including this keyword that related to this theme and to this category. Student P2 gave an apt response to learning and how it connects to the classroom:

"...there is a limit of how much you can learn from books and not from experience. I really loved the fact that I was able to connect a lot of that information or -- those cases studies I learned before like from my reading, to the experience that we had in Ethiopia itself." (P2)

Additionally, Student P1 talked about how classroom learning was expanded significantly because of the trip:

"So that was really nice when we actually went to Ethiopia that took our learning to a completely different level. So we were actually able to see it in context, see it in reality, while beforehand [in the classroom] it was just talking." (P1)

The theme of learning is consistent with the definition of learning given in the first chapter (see page 9) by Booth (1997). This theme generally explored student learning. Other learning experiences, such as the following theme on exploring new academic experiences, could be classified under an umbrella theme of learning, but this theme was developed to show general responses to qualities in learning that fall somewhat outside responses that could otherwise be attributed to a specific theme.

4.1.3.1.4 Exploring new academic experiences. This theme emerged from the key focus of new learning opportunities revealed in the creation of individual profiles earlier in this chapter. This theme generally focused on students' recognition of new avenues of study that came about as a result of the regional academic travel trip. The quotes below show this exploration of new academic experiences within the context of connection to supplementing or complementing the classroom experience. Student P1 did a lot of academic exploration so as to enhance his classroom learning. The public health trip had students from a host of different majors, offering an opportunity for students, such as Student P1, to learn from students outside their major or even their general field of inquiry:

"I am really interested in community development, but I'm a science major and although I do a lot of readings, there is always certain limitations of how much I do know about some of the social models. But the person I was working with, he's actually [a social science] major— and for me it was great just to be able to work with [the social science student], because he would fill those gaps of knowledge that I had when writing." (P1)

Student E5, did a thoughtful comparison between what is learned in class and what is learned in the field, and, at least at the time of the interview, where he stood in relation to classroom learning versus learning in the field:

"I really want to get back to the field. Learning stuff in the class, I really like the course I'm taking this semester...I really want to make a difference with what I'm learning...I want to take what I'm learning in the classroom, use it in a practical way, not necessarily building houses...I understand that what I'm learning is going to be useful and I'm enjoying what I'm learning, but I really want to put that to use as soon as possible." (E5)

4.1.3.1.5 Summary. This category and the themes making up this category show a glimpse of the connection students have made between classroom learning and the learning they experienced in Sri Lanka or Ethiopia. Themes from student responses such as approach to structured assignments, exploration of new academic experiences, and general learning experiences offers a contextual view of the learning lifeworld by linking themes originating from various analysis techniques or different stages of analysis.

4.1.3.2 Category: Developing academic skills. This category emerged from student responses indicating various skills that were developed during the regional academic travel trip. Students discussed skills such as *problem solving*, *teamwork*, and *discovering innovation*. The category of developing academic skills and these three themes are presented in Figure 4.2., and direct quotes from the themes are presented below.

FIGURE 4.2 : Category – Developing Academic Skills and Constituent Themes

<i>Regional academic travel as experience that develops academic skills</i>	<i>experiential problem solving</i> - How is the experience helping students to connect to familiar or new ways of solving problems?
	<i>teamwork</i> - The importance of working with others, including fellow students, local citizens, or hospital/NGO staff.
	<i>discovering innovation</i> - Discovering innovative strategies, sometimes without the expected tools of innovation (such as advanced technological equipment or digital tools).

4.1.3.2.1 Experiential problem solving. The theme of problem solving was evident in several responses and came about from the first cycle descriptive coding of all transcripts, and was more prevalent in the responses from students who attended the EfSI trip. This is likely because of the difference in design between the two trips; students on the EfSI trip were working with Habitat for Humanity and helping to build houses, whereas students on the public health trip served more as observers. However, the

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variation of responses from each trip exemplifies the development of problem solving skills. Student E5, who was in a group of students tasked with finding communications strategies for the villagers, spoke directly to the theme of experiential problem-solving:

“The thing is [before the trip the organizers] didn’t really tell you they have a problem with communication and you have to solve it. They just told you, find out how they communicate in that village and try to propose -- it doesn’t have to be a solution, maybe there’s no problem, maybe everything works fine, but try to propose something to enhance or some new idea like a word. If you identify a problem then try to solve it, but if everything works fine and everything works smoothly, then just propose a new idea that could make it run smoother.” (E5)

Student P5 developed problem-solving skills in trying to learn about a complex public health system in a short time, and be able to prepare information that could be communicated to prospective donors or non-governmental organizations:

“... the problem was that it's very hard to communicate the way it was working to an outsider... So our main objective was to just figure out the structure and the inner workings of the [centre] and later document that in a comprehensible way which can be presented to donors as well as the external NGO community.” (P5)

Student P7, similarly to Student P5, spoke of the need to solve problems with limited scope of understanding:

“...we would have reflection sessions with [name provided] and she always emphasized the importance to listen to people, that if you want to help people, you have to listen to them, and there was also this general theme around what [the centre] did, a narrative type theme, that when people come in you listen to them, because they have various problems that go together. So I think, she really wanted that to come across in our work somehow... So I think that affected not only mine but everyone’s projects.” (P7)

Student E1 developed problem-solving skills in the context of his worldview on approaching global problems from a personal and local point of view:

“prior to [the trip], my world view would be, globally when we talk about solving global problems then we can consider uniting but when it comes to local problems, problems in your own family then, you have to deal with them on your own. But after the trip, that changed; that you can at least take part in solving very personal problem in someone else.” (E1)

Other students, including virtually all of the EfSI students (all except E4), and a couple of public health students (P1 and P2) spoke of problem-solving directly or indirectly during their interview. This evidences a strong rationale for the inclusion of this theme as part of this category.

4.1.3.2.2 Teamwork. Working in teams was another skill identified by a number of students during both trips. This skill also came about from the descriptive coding process as a result of student responses at various stages of the interview process. The quotations below represent the variation in responses regarding teamwork.

Student P2 recognized that the structure of the teams was helpful in trying to achieve a variety of outcomes:

“[NYUAD] approved [the assignment structure]...but each group had a different frame because the point of this was to I think get us the greatest variety possible,” (P2)

Student E6 saw the general benefits of teamwork to his learning during the trip:

“...you understood the importance of teamwork at that point, because we stood in a line and we had to pass on the bricks one by one...It was very hard, but at the end, everyone was proud of the whole team, of themselves, and it was just a very great learning experience.” (E6)

The theme of teamwork was deliberate in the setup of these two regional academic travel trips by the Office of Global Education, and the benefits of learning in a team environment is evidenced from the responses provided above. Teamwork, like problem-solving, was referenced by students many times during interviews.

4.1.3.2.3 Discovering innovation. Developing innovation skills are a key component to engineering education (Badran, 2007; Smith et al., 2013). Skills in innovation are less prevalent in public health education, however there are experiences that help to develop these skills no matter what the discipline.

This theme was developed during the first cycle descriptive coding process, and is named because students uncovered innovative practices without any technological tools to assist them. The idea that technology was a prerequisite for discovering innovative techniques is a presupposition that came from the student responses that comprise this theme. Nearly all of the responses under this theme came from the EfSI trip, especially as related to the discovery of innovation without technology. However, there were a couple of general responses from the public health trip related to this theme.

Student E5 spoke of the link between innovation and technology:

"Innovation goes hand-in-hand with technology, but design doesn't necessarily have to. You can design a house made of really basic and primitive materials and still it could look nice...I think you can think of innovative ways to do stuff without having to resort to newer technologies, just finding new ways to use things that already exists."

(E5)

Student P1 wanted to bracket his presuppositions to expectations when it came to discovering innovation:

"...but on the other hand I knew that when it comes to this context, the most innovative -- when there is a lack of resources, most of the projects that happen in these places are really innovative in the strategies they use because you have to make an efficient use of these resources. So I was really excited about that perspective." (P1)

Sometimes technology assumes that a particular technology is advanced and “cutting edge”. Student E6, noted that some “ancient technologies” sometimes end up working better:

“But these guys used threads and a weight and they just hang the weight from one side and the other side and they see the equality from there...It was just very surprising to see how using just simple...ancient technologies, they were able to construct what we do with technologies that we have available today, advanced technologies.” (E6)

Innovation in the absence of technology, or any tools for that matter, can still be innovation. Students (especially engineering students) learned that innovative practices are not reliant on having access to the latest technology. The innovation skills learned during the regional academic travel trip could help students to develop strategies for developing and discovering innovation inside the classroom and in other academic experiences (i.e. future academic travel trips).

4.1.3.2.4 Summary. This category presented academic skills including problem-solving, teamwork, and discovering innovation, that students have acquired, or at least have developed, during or as a result of their regional academic travel trip. In relation to the learning lifeworld, these general skills can be applied and transferred to other academic experiences students have at NYU Abu Dhabi. This represents a slightly wider scope than the preceding category of classroom learning experience. Students could utilize these skills in the classroom, on subsequent academic travel trips, or in their non-academic experiences at University. Furthermore, this category presented the key skills that offer tools that assist students in becoming better learners. The ability to solve problems is linked to increased reflective thinking skills. Individuals with higher reflective thinking skills are able to step back and evaluate the way they solve problems (Kitchener & King, 1981). This linkage between problem-solving and reflective thinking will be explored further in the next chapter.

4.1.3.3 Category: Affecting students' future academic, personal, and professional endeavours. Students were asked questions about their expectations before the regional academic travel trip and their experience during the trip. Some reflective questions asked students to recall the rewarding and most challenging parts of the trip, and to consider their worldview before and after the trip. The variation of responses to questions included how the trip will affect their future academic plans, and how the trip will affect them personally and professionally. These responses came under the themes of *academic impact*, *personal impact* (which includes professional impact), *opportunities*, and *change*. The future focus was developed based on the analysis of data from the first cycle to the second cycle. As second cycle coding took place, it became evident that students chose some responses to focus on how this trip affected and impacted their future academic, personal, and professional plans. The category and constituent themes are included in Figure 4.3 below, followed by quotes evidencing these themes.

FIGURE 4.3: Category – Affecting Students' Future Endeavours and Constituent Themes

<i>Regional academic travel as experience that affects students' future academic, personal, and professional endeavours.</i>	<i>academic impact</i> - The impact of regional academic travel trip on academic choices.
	<i>personal impact (including professional impact)</i> - Impact of regional academic travel trip on personal life.
	<i>opportunities</i> - Instances of the word "opportunities" indicating a notable quote.
	<i>change</i> - Instances of the word "change" indicating a notable quote.

4.1.3.3.1 Academic impact. The theme of academic impact, which emerged from the first cycle descriptive coding process, encompassed responses related to choices students make involving their studies at University. This could range from choosing a major course of study, choosing a different class, or choosing to look at their learning in a different way. As mentioned above, the focus of this theme in relation to this category is on

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future choices. Future simply means any point in time after their return from the regional academic travel trip, and could have taken place before the interview for this research. Some responses that focused on students' future academic choices include the following quote from Student P3:

“So now I want to go into a public health as well. Like maybe in [degrees such as] NDP [Nursing Doctor]—MD [Medical Doctor], MDDS [Doctor of Medicine with Distinction of Service], or somehow get involved in public health.” (P3)

Student E5 had a more broad view of the academic impact of his experience:

“I think it was a major game changer. I think it made me realize that I’m more into practical than theoretical. I really like being out there and doing the work apart from planning it.” (E5)

The academic impact theme, in the context of the learning lifeworld, yields insight into how students relate their experience to their overall learning. The effect of the regional academic travel trip on their academic choices came about not only from assignments completed during the trip, but from the trip experience overall. In turn, the overall trip experience impacts more than just academic choices, as evidenced from the other themes that make up this category of description.

4.1.3.3.2 Personal impact. For students, the line between academic life – involving a host of structured learning opportunities in the university – and personal life may not be entirely clear. A student's personal life may involve examining their thoughts and feelings about who they are as a person, and how they interact with people in the world; it might involve reflecting on feelings about who they are (or might be) as a person or thoughts on their future professional aspirations. The distinction between personal impact and academic impact lay in the focus of the impact. In other words, the academic impact theme focused on the learner as a student, whereas the theme of personal impact focused on the learner as a person. Example quotes from the personal impact theme in the context of this category on future endeavours are presented below.

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Student E3 spent a lot of time during the interview talking about the impact the trip had on his view of happiness and future job prospects:

“...now I have a different idea of what my future should be like. I don’t want to just focus on the whole plan of getting into a really good, well paid job and stay there and just make money that’s it. I want to have something that kind of connects back to this feeling of happiness with nearly nothing.” (E3)

Student P4 did a fair amount of reflecting on this topic, and although she did not come to many conclusions about her future endeavours, she does acknowledge that the trip did more for her personally than it did academically:

“I guess there were [other] experiences that changed me personally. But I guess that has more to do with say my outlook on life than what I did in my academic studies...” (P4)

Student P6 simply talked about making new friends with whom she continues to keep in touch, with the goal of returning to Ethiopia to volunteer in some way:

“I might [go back and volunteer], but this summer I just have other plans but if I didn’t have these other plans, I would definitely go there again in the summer... Just to go the centre and just to volunteer in any way and yeah, it would be amazing.” (P6)

This focus on future academic, personal, and professional endeavours links this category with research on possible selves, defined by Markus and Nurius (1986) as “specific, individually significant hopes, fears, and fantasies...individualized or personalized, but they are also distinctly social,” and are “the direct result of previous social comparisons in which the individual’s own thoughts, feelings, characteristics, and behaviours have been contrasted to those of salient others” (p. 954). A further discussion on possible selves and the learning lifeworld will take place in the discussion of findings in the next chapter.

4.1.3.3.3 Opportunities. The keyword *opportunities* (or *opportunity*) was searched based on the research questions for this research. A couple of notable quotes from the interviews show how this theme fits into the category of future academic, personal, and professional endeavours. For instance, Student P5 spoke of the regional academic travel experience in the context of his overall academic experience, and in how it may have affected his future development:

“...it helped me understand how privileged I am and how lucky I am to be here at the University, but just generally to have opportunities that I have of not being tied to...that socio-economic situation where people obviously have very limited options...because when we are reflecting [at NYUAD] on a micro-level...[In Ethiopia] it really made us think...how can I apply that to situations like these in the future, if that makes sense.” (P5)

Student E6 also looked to the future with the hope to returning to Sri Lanka one day:

“I’m looking into volunteer opportunities at the moment as well, and I would love to go back [to Sri Lanka] and do something about this, if I can.” (E6)

Student E1, continuing his discussion on how playing a small part can have big impact, also addressed from now on, he will not always assume that he has to be part of something big to make a big impact:

“...when everyone does small parts, then together, we can accomplish something bigger... You don’t need to wait for a big opportunity.” (E1)

Opportunities as a keyword across the entire transcript held different meanings for different students. Some students saw an opportunity to make a contribution, whilst other students saw opportunities to develop themselves. No matter what the context, these varied responses showed a pattern of looking ahead to the future.

4.1.3.3.4 Change. Not unlike other keywords that ended up constituting themes, the theme around the keyword of change was developed based on the research questions. Like the theme of opportunity, the theme of change contained quotes from students as related to the category of future endeavours. One of these quotes, from Student P1, show how this trip has sparked an interest in students to return to Ethiopia in the future to continue the work that was started:

“I'd really like to go back and see how it has changed...I mean for me just the way they were doing their work in there reassured me that this is possible, to change the context of many of these places.” (P1)

Student E6 saw a change in his outlook on life and being grateful for the basic necessities in life as a result of the trip to Sri Lanka:

“And this is something that if everyone can experience that water, electricity, all these basic things that we do not care about in just our life. If for one or two days, they can become luxuries for them, if they have a shortage of them, they would realize how it changes...your outlook on life changes a lot. And so, I don't exactly know how to describe it, it's much more emotional than it is, than I can say it in words, but it changed me a lot in a significant way.” (E6)

4.1.3.3.5 Summary. Change can be a word with different meanings depending on the context. This section looked at the variation of instances of students using the word change, and how it fits into the larger category of affecting students' academic, personal, and professional endeavours. In relation to the student learning lifeworld, the scope of this category is slightly broader than the first two categories presented in this chapter. The relationship between the categories will be discussed in greater detail in the outcome space section below, where the categories will be compared to one another to form a relationship between the categories. This is the point that the categories will take their final form as conceptions.

4.1.3.4 Category: Students seeing themselves in the world. Killick (2012) described the term *self-in-the-world* as globally citizenship minded students who are internationally mobile feeling more comfortable with otherness and being able to reflect on their mobility experience. This category of description comprises themes that have emerged from interview questions (*change in worldview*), and first cycle descriptive coding (*impact of experience, impact on community and world*). This category is primarily focused on how the regional academic travel trip shaped students' worldview, including how they see the world, how they see themselves in the world, and the impact their experience has had on the people they interacted with in the communities in Sri Lanka or Ethiopia, and the impact of the experience on their lives. Figure 4.4 presents the category of description and the constituent themes that make up this category. The quotes making up the themes that led to the development of this category were varied and spread across virtually all of the responses, thereby demonstrating a good rationale for the emergence of this category. Some of the key quotes from these themes as they relate to reflection on impacts student made and could make are presented below.

FIGURE 4.4: Category – Seeing Oneself in the World and Constituent Themes

<i>Regional academic travel as experience that allows students to see themselves in the world</i>	<i>impact on community and world</i> - How the student has had impact on the community or "the world" (used in general to mean they are doing good in general) as a result of the regional academic travel trip.
	<i>impact of experience</i> - A student understanding the impact he or she has within the experience, or the impact the experience has had on her or him.
	<i>change in worldview</i> - Passages that indicated change in how a student views their world or outlook on life.

4.1.3.4.1 Impact on community and world. This theme was developed from coding of responses students gave across to a number of questions asked during the interview, including questions about the most rewarding and most challenging aspects of the trip. The responses students gave in this theme were emotional and empathetic given the personal connections some students made with people they met during the trip. For instance, Student E3 didn't expect to make as big an impact as originally expected:

"They were hugging us, crying, partying, shouting, dancing...Getting to see the expression of feelings on them that was the most rewarding thing I've ever experienced. I mean, because even now, when I look back at it, I didn't do much." (E3)

EfSI students were building houses for families, whereas public health students were observing and interviewing people leading a final report for the social centre. Even though public health students did not directly take part in treating people, students such as Student P3, saw the impact on the community through their presence:

"... I realized that every moment spent trying to do something was really doing something and when we left, we got feedback from people who we worked with in the social centre, and then when we were at the hospital...the patients spoke to us and said, 'Hey, I am really glad I got to spend this time with you.'...So giving back to the community was really empowering." (P3)

Student P7 saw the power of connecting to people and listening to their concerns as a way to better understand how important her presence was for these people:

"...I think interacting with their parents and listening to the story and their concerns with their son really like brought home the idea of how important it is to be a doctor, not in terms of just solving issues, but more on like a societal level where they really listen to your problems, so that was really interesting." (P7)

These reflective moments gave good insight into how their experience impacted the people they met, and making a difference in the world for them is about personal connections to the people they helped. This infusion of the emotional self into a learning environment was reinforced by Beard, Clegg, and Smith (2007), when they wrote, “it is important to understand the affective dimension in pedagogic encounters and the lifeworld of students,” (p. 235) and they argued the role of emotion in educational encounters lead to a richer understanding of the student lifeworld without the need for a deeper discussion into the therapeutic dimension. This theme shows both the rational and emotional dimensions of students’ experience through their own reflection. A mixture of the emotional and the rational is evident in the quotes related to this theme, and to the other themes in this category.

4.1.3.4.2 Impact of experience. This broad theme emerged early on in the first cycle descriptive coding process, encompassing the effect the regional academic travel trip had on the student or the impact the experience had on the student learning experience. Given the broad reach of this theme, there were many passages that fit under this theme. The quotes presented below are evidence of the responses from this theme that best match this category of description. The public health trip involved gathering information to help promote the social centre. Students also observed patients recovering from surgery, which had a clear impact on their experience, as evidenced below. The EfSI trip had a different focus in which students were directly involved in building houses for local villagers. EfSI students were directly involved in the betterment of the villagers, whereas the public health students were not directly responsible for the betterment of the villagers with whom they interacted. This didn’t necessarily diminish the perceived impact students felt they had or the impact the experience had on them, but the differences between the two trips did yield a wider variation in responses.

For instance, Student E1 recalled a moment during the trip when children asked to touch his hair because it was different from their hair, and how this made him realize the impact of the experience on him:

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“So, they came to me and they were asking if they could touch my hair and they were very surprised and amazed to see how different my hair was so, it gave me more self-esteem and so I know it had an impact on them as well.” (E1)

Student P2 had a more personal connection during her observation of patients:

“...there was one situation when I was just playing with one little child in the waiting area. And at some point when we stop playing and our group was about to evacuate from the building, she just came up to me and she hugged me and said, thank you, even though she didn't speak English. So that was nice. And that sounds very cheesy, but it was super touching.” (P2)

Student E3 spoke of how the little things can end up having the most impact:

“I mean, it was the first time I've experienced something like that and the first time I feel accomplished. But I'd say the most rewarding was just, getting to see how little things can make actually big impact on people.” (E3)

Student P4, when asked about the most rewarding part of her experience, responded in what she thought was a simple observation, but she touched upon her feelings around the connection between happiness and materialism:

“The people lived in absolute poverty but you could also see how happiness had nothing to do with material wealth. A lot of these people were very happy despite their circumstances and that was really good to see.” (P4)

Student P4 in general spent a lot of her interview discussing the inequities of society, and how some people are genuinely happy with what they have given their life circumstances. However, during an extended tourist stay in Ethiopia directly after the public health trip, she discovered that materialism was possibly dependent on the situation. When she was a tourist, she discovered that she found people for which “money had more of like a compelling force for them” (*Ibid.*) This contrast in experience led her to have deeper thoughts about the subject of materialism and happiness, which she was still pondering at the time of the interview.

Student P6 brought in another dimension of impact through her reflecting on the impact her fellow students had on her during the trip:

“I think it is amazing, to expand my horizons. It’s an opportunity to learn about new places, to meet new people and at the same time to be more in touch with those students who I study with... Just like learning about new people in a different way and just like memories, adventures, I mean just great. Combining both leisure and academics and friendships and everything.” (P6)

This theme confirmed that nearly all students’ experienced something during their trip that impacted them. Although some kind of impact may seem like a given, the differences in impacts, as evidenced by the quotations above, produce a rich account of the ways these impacts show students’ perceptions of how they have impact on a community or in the world.

4.1.3.4.3 Change in worldview. This theme was developed directly from interviews with students who were asked to consider if their view of the world before the trip changed as a result of the trip. Most of the students responded that there was a change in how they saw the world or how the trip affected their outlook on life. This theme yielded interesting variations in responses. A number of students responded with gratitude for the things they have in their lives.

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Student E6 also had gratitude for the things he had, and compared the experience in Sri Lanka to his experience in Abu Dhabi and in his home country:

“But just going back [to Abu Dhabi], especially because it was my senior year and I knew that after this, I would eventually have to go back home for a period and just knowing that I could be in [the same] position [at home as those in Sri Lanka], it changed me a lot definitely. I think today, I care about this stuff more than I’ve cared about before...it’s much more emotional than it is, than I can say it in words, but it changed me a lot in a significant way.” (E6)

Student P2 had to challenge her preconceived thoughts of Ethiopia during the trip:

“[Before the trip, I had] preconceived thoughts about situations because I knew the community in a certain way and so reshaping how I see the community was difficult because I would see something and I would be like, oh, it’s this.” (P2)

Student P4 took a broader view of the world as a result of the trip. She talked about how the Ethiopia trip compared to her travels to other countries. The below passage indicates that she was still processing her thoughts and feelings on how the Ethiopia trip has affected her worldview:

“I believe more or less in the same things that I believed before I went to China but this experience brought it back more strongly and it was in a different cultural context...it was kind of eye-opening to me to just see that like my world is a lot smaller than I thought it was, and that outside of that people don’t believe in the same things.” (P4)

Student E7 brings this theme around full circle. Whilst some students focused on their own gratitude, Student E7 was impressed by the gratitude he saw in the villagers in Sri Lanka, and how their outlook on life differed in some ways to his own, and their outlook might be a bit more common than he originally thought:

“...it’s interesting because they don’t want more; they want a house, they are happy with that...And some of the questions were like, ‘What’s the next step?’...and they were like, ‘That’s it. Really now, that’s it. We’ve got the house and that’s it. That’s all we need.’ They don’t want more. I think that the fact that [these ways of thinking] do exist here, I’m sure they do exist elsewhere.” (E7)

The change in the way students look at the world could inform this research by offering some insight into the way students think about themselves and the world around them. The link between the internal world of the student and the external world of the regional academic travel experience is a point from which to discuss the learning lifeworld. Understanding from the student point of view how they have changed their outlook on the world is one way to better understand the lifeworld, and will be discussed further in the next chapter during the discussion of findings.

4.1.3.4.4 Summary. This category of description on how students see themselves in the world is the broadest of the four categories presented in terms of scope. Also, this category contains the most affective and emotional responses, demonstrating evidence that learning is about feeling in an experience as much as it is about thinking. Thinking and feeling in learning is a holistic way of understanding learning, and in turn this holistic way of learning can lead to an even richer understanding of the learning lifeworld.

4.1.4 Outcome Space

Each of the four categories of description came from a compilation of themes presented in the prior section. Phenomenographic analysis culminates in the outcome space, and the four categories are now placed in a logical relationship to one another, thereby becoming conceptions. The focus of this research on gaining a better understanding of the learning lifeworld served as a starting point for the development of conceptions. If the learning lifeworld is a link between the individual and the world around the individual, then the logical relationship between the categories of description should represent some scope of an individual’s learning. This scope of learning is centred in the classroom as the primary starting point for learning, where

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formal learning takes place, and represents the primary learning setting at a university. Beyond the classroom, general skills developed can be used in the classroom and outside the classroom within the university. The next scope of learning is the border between the university and the outside world where learning affects future academic, personal, and professional endeavours. Finally, the scope of learning with the broadest reach is where students look at how their learning affects their outlook on life and their place in the world.

Based on the conceptual premise of scope of learning, the four categories of description can now be presented in relation to one another in this outcome space, and are presented in the following order from narrowest scope to broadest scope:

- Conception 1 - Regional academic travel as experience that either supplements or complements classroom learning.
- Conception 2 – Regional academic travel as experience that develops academic skills.
- Conception 3 – Regional academic travel as experience that affects students' future academic, personal, and professional endeavours.
- Conception 4 – Regional academic travel as experience that allows students to see themselves in the world.

These scopes of learning, developed specifically for this research, can be visualised as series of nested circles, as presented in Figure 4.5. The four conceptions are hierarchical based on the scope of the learning lifeworld. For example, Conception 1 uses the classroom as a scope of learning; Conception 2 uses the academic skills as a scope of learning; Conception 3 looks at the student in relation to their NYUAD experience and their future life plans outside of NYUAD; and Conception 4 focuses on how the student sees the regional academic travel trip fitting into their overall place in the world.

The logical relationship among the conceptions is in the context of the learning lifeworld. If students seek to understand how their learning fits in to their view of the world, they engage with Conception 4. The other 3 conceptions would comprise specifically focused aspects of their learning

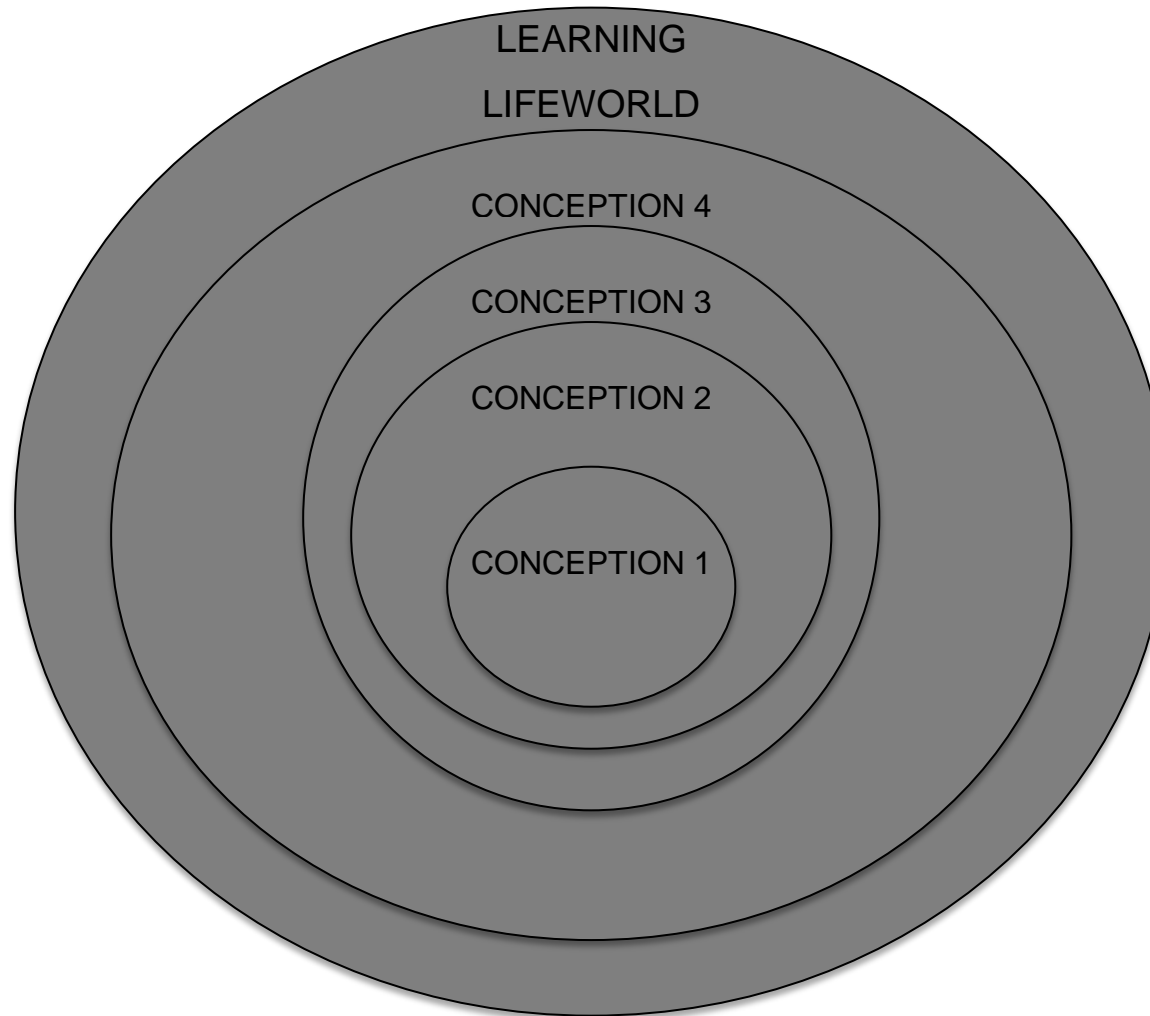
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experiences starting with the classroom (Conception 1), then increasing scope to their experience within NYUAD (Conception 2), followed by how learning affects their future selves both inside NYUAD and in their lives beyond NYUAD (Conception 3), and finally returning to the larger scope of Conception 4. Additionally, Conception 1 is embedded in Conception 2, which is embedded in Conception 3. Each conception can exist individually, or can be a way for students to holistically understand their learning experience. If a student holds a broader conception, then the lower numbered conceptions would be incorporated. For example, if a student holds a conception of learning experience that falls under Conception 2 (such as the development of interview research techniques), then this could most likely have a direct effect on their learning as it relates to Conception 1 (classroom learning); students who are reflecting on their place in the world (Conception 4) could reflect on their future place in that world and how they would like to further explore their endeavours (Conception 3) in relation to that impact.

It is important to acknowledge that the learning described in these conceptions also contains an affective dimension. Some of the responses (especially in Conception 4) convey a sensory experience, which is embodied in what Yorks & Kasl (2006) call *expressive ways of knowing*. Additionally, Beard, Clegg, & Smith (2005) acknowledge affective learning as part of the whole rather than from a dualist (affective versus cognitive/rational) perspective.

Student responses indicate strong emotional responses to handshakes, hugs, and perhaps simply smiles when they interacted with local people during their experience. These interactions were the clearest indications of affective learning, but there were other more subtle emotional responses to learning experiences which took place across all conceptions.

FIGURE 4.5: Logical Relationship of Conceptions



4.1.5 Summary

The above results of phenomenographic analysis show a rich account of students' reflections and responses of their regional academic travel trips. The resulting four conceptions are a good starting point for interpreting the findings of this research. While the student responses during the phenomenographic interviews yielded insight into learning and a possible glimpse into the learning lifeworld, further information was needed on students' reflective thinking ability to help understand if the reflections given by students during the interview represent substantive reflective thinking as a means to authenticate their accounts, which could lead to a better understanding of the learning lifeworld.

4.2 Reflective Judgment Interview Score Results

Table 4.3 presents the resulting three-digit scores for each reflective judgment (RJ) interview held by each rater – Rater 1 was my thesis supervisor and Rater 2 was me – and the final stage rating for each student as determined by the most prevalent stage (or average stage) from both sets of scores. This final rating was determined by the reflective judgment interview scoring process presented in the previous chapter (see page 53). This section recounts direct quotations from the interviews that support the scoring decisions. The table shows a distribution across reflective judgment stages. Of the fourteen students interviewed, three students provided responses that exhibited Stage 3 reflective thinking, three students exhibited Stage 4 reflective thinking, five students provided responses that exhibited Stage 5 reflective thinking, and three students exhibited Stage 6 reflective thinking. These four stages are presented below, along with direct quotes as evidence of scoring results.

TABLE 4.3: Reflective Judgment Scores

<u>Participant</u>	<u>Rater 1</u>	<u>Rater 2</u>	<u>RJ Stage</u>
E1	2-4-5	3-3-4	3
E2	2-4-5	3-3-3	3
E3	4-5-6	3-4-4	4
E4	4-4-6	5-5-5	5
E5	4-5-5	4-5-5	5
E6	5-5-6	5-6-6	6
E7	4-4-5	4-4-5	4
P1	6-6-6	7-6-6	6
P2	5-5-6	5-5-4	5
P3	3-4-5	3-3-2	3
P4	4-5-5	4-5-5	5
P5	4-5-6	5-6-6	6
P6	4-4-5	4-5-5	5
P7	4-4-4	4-4-5	4

4.2.1 Stage 3 Reflective Thinking

Stage 3 is the highest stage of pre-reflective thinking, where knowledge is considered a certainty, and obtained from authority figures, but can sometimes be seen as temporarily uncertain, usually manifesting as personal opinion. Three of the fourteen students interviewed for this research were determined to have Stage 3 reflective thinking. Example quotes from students exhibiting Stage 3 reflective thinking include Student E1 who was asked about whether an opinion is right and one is wrong when two people hold different opinions about a problem:

“Not always. I think maybe both can be right...or in some cases, one can be right and the other is not...together they form a bigger picture.”

(E1)

Student P3, when asked the same question, also exhibited Stage 3 reflective thinking:

“Well, it depends on what we are talking about. If it is hard science, yes, there is a right and a wrong. But if it is about, I don’t know, ideas, religion, things like that, then not necessarily.” (P3)

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Student E2 also responded using personal opinions and information received from authorities to support claims:

“Or papers I picked up in school or it’s like, it’s actual proof that we are getting warmer and while we might not be going at such a big pace or fast pace, you can see the scientific trends that we are getting warmer. I see it sometimes in the news broadcast, ‘oh we broke a [temperature] record today that we haven’t broken since 1980.’ We broke ten records in ten days, that’s just not normal.” (E2)

These three students scored the lowest reflective thinking scores, yet still achieved scores that are typical for undergraduate college students (King & Kitchener, 1994, p. 280). What is most notable of these three students is that two of the three have graduated from NYU Abu Dhabi, whilst the third is currently a second-year student. King & Kitchener (1994) have argued that higher reflective thinking is consistent with educational attainment. The two graduates may have started out on a lower level of reflective thinking and improved during their college career, but this is speculative since there are no data on these students earlier in their academic career.

4.2.2 Stage 4 Reflective Thinking

Students who exhibited Stage 4 reflective thinking fall in the second level of reflective thinking called quasi-reflective thinking. Stage 4 reflective thinking views knowledge as uncertain and show some ambiguity in their knowledge claims, which can be evidenced through distinctively personal variables. Three of the fourteen students interviewed exhibited Stage 4 reflective thinking, and example quotes from these three students follow.

Student P7, when asked if one can ever know that a position on a particular issue is correct, offered an answer that showed uncertainty, but was not evidenced strongly:

“You can never know for sure. I don’t think you can know for sure...I don’t think there’s concrete evidence out there that points one way or the other, right...Even if you are sure, many people are not going to be believe, so think that’s the main problem.” (P7)

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Student E3, when asked the same question, responded with a similar level of reflective thinking:

“For sure is really difficult thing to do because we don’t have -- there isn’t straight evidence, clear evidence, it’s also doing that -- we’re trying to connect the dots...And just we think that this happened because of this, because there isn’t any other explanation. I’m not excluding any option...but to actually prove it hundred per cent and make sure this is the right reason for it, I don’t think that can be done but you can try.”

(E3)

Finally, Student E7 exhibited Stage 4 reflective thinking when asked if it is ever the case that one opinion is right and one is wrong when two people differ on a matter:

“...it depends on where are you looking at it from. Depends on where are coming from, right?...Some people actually think it is a cost of the process, just like the money you pay for something, so it’s part of the cost. Some people don’t and then you have discussions between two people who don’t agree on something and sometimes there can be a right and a wrong, it depends.” (E7)

The three students above who exhibited Stage 4 reflective thinking fall in the higher range of typical undergraduate college students in studies reviewed by King & Kitchener (1994). These students are at three different points in their academic career; one student is a second-year student, another student is a fourth-year student, and the third student is a recent graduate. These students are the second lowest reflective thinkers in this study, yet they are still above average in comparison to results from other studies of undergraduate students (*Ibid.*).

4.2.3 Stage 5 Reflective Thinking

Students who have exhibited Stage 5 reflective thinking still fall in the second (middle) level of reflective thinking called quasi-reflective thinking. However, unlike Stage 4 reflective thinking, Stage 5 views knowledge as contextual and subjective, and the evidence to make knowledge claims are

seen as known, and context specific, or balanced against other interpretations, which can sometimes complicate conclusions made. Five of the fourteen students interviewed exhibited Stage 5 reflective thinking, making it the stage with the largest number of students. Example quotes from each student follows.

Student P2, when asked if she had an opinion about the argument, discussed her opinion in the context of her knowledge and knowledge about the subject:

“So, I think I am somewhere in between, while obviously it is...a natural phenomenon it's been also increased definitely by human activity in the last...100 years...So, while it's natural phenomenon, it is certainly increased by the human activity, and cutting – might be from a more policy view, drastically cutting the emission of gases or anything that pretty much contributes to it, it's perfectly feasible in developed countries that already had their time to emit as much as they want. But it would clearly impact countries who are not yet there, so there needs to be some balance, the balance needs to be found between the developed countries and countries who are still unable to cut their own emission because it would impede their development, their further development.” (P2)

Student E4 responded with the following when asked if one can ever know for sure if a position on an issue is correct:

“Well, nothing is really set in stone, if that makes sense, but you can know if something shows more results...so for example, like the people who are using scientific methods to show that scientifically, why climate change is happening, maybe they have results that show that it's really happening...And the others are more --they see them, but maybe they choose to let their fear, let's say I think, their fear and try to kind of distance themselves to...not be connected in any way or whatsoever to what they're saying.” (E4)

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Student P4 took a stance where she disagreed with both sides of the climate change debate:

“So I disagree with the claim that climate change is not happening therefore we don’t need to do anything about, about resources, about our relationship to the environment. I think that’s irresponsible. I also disagree with the extreme other side who say[s], you know, climate change is deepening, that we need to pay attention to other things like sustainable economic growth, don’t need to take place or don’t need to take a back seat on that [sic].” (P4)

Student E5, when asked if we can ever know for sure that one’s position on an issue is correct, offered the clearest response indicative of Stage 5 reflective thinking:

“No, of course not. Because there always could be new information that could debunk my information. I don’t think that anything can be proved, I think we can find evidence that suggests that is something is true or false.” (E5)

The final student who exhibited Stage 5 reflective thinking, Student P6, responded with the following when asked how it’s possible for people to have such different points of view on this subject:

“I’m pretty sure they have even more views, it’s not even people, it’s not even the climate change, might be other reasons...I don’t know, there might be millions of reasons and these are the main, more, not reliable, but more possible reasons behind it.” (P6)

Students at Stage 5 reflective thinking represent the highest level of quasi-reflective thinking, the middle level of the reflective judgment model. These students, all second year students, showed that despite being in the early part of their academic career, they have a high level of reflective thinking, which could be an indicator of the authenticity of the account of their experience during the interview. According to King & Kitchener (1994), students who are Stage 5 reflective thinkers fall somewhere between reflective thinking scores of Masters level and Doctoral level students.

4.2.4 Stage 6 Reflective Thinking

Students in this research who exhibited Stage 6 reflective thinking fall in the highest level of reflective thinking (reserved for Stage 6 and Stage 7). Stage 6 reflective thinkers view knowledge as individual conclusions about ill-structured problems on the basis of information taken from a variety of sources, and justify their knowledge based on comparing evidence from different perspectives across different contexts. Three of the fourteen students exhibited Stage 6 reflective thinking, and quotes from each of their interviews are contained below.

Student P1, when asked how it is possible that experts in the field disagree about the subject of climate change, gave the following response:

"...there is a natural component to it and there is a human component to it . And even in my case, they get really mixed. And I feel that's the case with most experts on climate change. So knowing that the issue we were talking about, even if it is purely natural issue, the fact that it may have big big consequences or repercussions over [the] human race, makes me think, OK, even if nature is in this way, [it] doesn't mean that I don't have to do anything, and there is a human component to that and that is a really emotionally loaded issue." (P1)

Student E6, when asked the same question on how experts can disagree about this subject, responded with the following:

"...so yes science is there, yes, you can prove something, you can collect data, you can say this is the fact, but at the same time it's like artists. So you can't say a painting is bad or good...So again, these are all opinions, there are no facts in it. It's a personal belief. And everyone has his own personal beliefs, so now you have two sides or maybe you even have multiple sides on this." (E6)

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Finally, Student P5, gave the following response when asked if we can ever know whether a position on the issue of climate change is correct:

“No, of course not. No I can’t for sure. Well, because we are not unbiased observers and we are not normatively rational. Obviously, we have asymmetric information...no one can be a 100 per cent informed about everything all the time. Especially in science, it changes with every issue of every journal on earth.” (P5)

The three students – two second-year students, and one recent graduate – who have Stage 6 reflective thinking have shown a very advanced reflective thinking ability, and further increased the likelihood that the account of their experience given during their interview was authentic, leading to a deeper understanding of their lifeworld. These three students, according to King & Kitchener’s measurements from prior studies, are more advanced than doctoral students in their reflective thinking abilities. It is possible that these three have the chance to attain the highest level of reflective thinking ability as they progress in their academic careers and beyond.

4.2.5 Summary

In sum, all fourteen students interviewed ranged in reflective thinking ability from Stage 3 to Stage 6. What is notable about the results is that across the two regional academic travel experiences, there was an even distribution of reflective thinking. Of the Stage 3 reflective thinkers, two students were from the EfSI trip and one student was from the public health trip; of the Stage 4 reflective thinkers, two students were from public health and one student was from EfSI; of the Stage 5 reflective thinkers, three students were from public health and two were from EfSI; and of the Stage 6 reflective thinkers, two were from public health and one from EfSI. Regardless of the reason, the reflective judgment score data can produce interesting information that can be used to compare results from the phenomenographic interview to help better understand how conceptions and reflective thinking together can further illuminate the learning lifeworld.

4.3 Comparing Conceptions and Reflective Judgement Scores

Now that the findings from both the phenomenographic interview (conceptions) and the reflective judgment interview (reflective judgment stages) have been presented, a discussion comparing conceptions against reflective thinking ability is possible to better understand how together these two could lead to a better understanding of the learning lifeworld. A better understanding of the learning lifeworld can be attained through a consideration of the breadth and depth of conversation in the phenomenographic interviews, and in a higher level of reflective thinking.

One way to measure breadth and depth of conversation is to look at the instances a conception appeared in the data. This approach is supported by the phenomenographic analysis process explained in the previous chapter (page 54). Table 4.4 below presents total instances of conceptions for each student, as well as totals for each conception, sorted primarily by reflective judgment stage, and secondarily by the instances of conceptions.

There are a couple of notable connections between reflective judgment stage and instances of conceptions. First, internal to the conceptions, Conception 1 had the fewest instances of conceptions, followed by Conception 2 as the second smallest, then Conception 3 as the second largest, and Conception 4 had the largest instances. The larger the instances, the more prevalent the conception was in the interview. Therefore, the hierarchical relationship of the conceptions – where Conception 1 is the most narrow and Conception 4 is the broadest, with Conception 2 and Conception 3 falling in between the two – is justified by the instances in the interview data.

Second, there is a connection between reflective judgment stage and instances of conceptions. Table 4.3 is sorted by reflective judgment stage, and then by instances of conceptions. The range of instances of conceptions for Stage 3 reflective thinking students is 19 to 32 (average of 25); for Stage 4 reflective thinking students, the range is 27 to 34 (average of 31); The range of conception instances for students exhibiting Stage 5 reflective thinking is 23 to 49 (average of 33); and the range of conception instances for students exhibiting Stage 6 reflective thinking is 41 to 49 (average of 45).

TABLE 4.4: Reflective Judgment Stage And Conceptions

Participant	RJ Stage	Conception 1	Conception 2	Conception 3	Conception 4	Total
E1	3	4	4	4	7	19
P3	3	2	3	8	10	23
E2	3	6	12	4	10	32
P7	4	3	7	8	9	27
E7	4	4	6	6	16	32
E3	4	2	10	12	10	34
E4	5	4	6	4	9	23
P6	5	3	3	7	11	24
P2	5	4	5	11	9	29
P4	5	5	5	12	18	40
E5	5	6	13	15	15	49
P5	6	5	11	8	17	41
P1	6	5	8	14	19	46
E6	6	5	12	11	21	49
<i>Total Instances</i>		58	105	124	181	

To further explore the connection between instances of conceptions and RJ stage, A Pearson's product moment correlation – which measures the predictability of one variable given the other variable (Cohen, Mannion & Morrison, 2011) – was applied to two variables: 1. reflective judgment stage and 2. instances of number of conceptions, and the resulting coefficient was $+0.67$, indicating a strong positive relationship (the closer to $+1$, the more positive the correlation) between reflective judgment stage and the instances of number of conceptions as variables. Given the limited number of data points ($n=14$), statistical significance was not found. Whilst the correlation coefficient does not indicate an explicit cause and effect relationship between reflective judgment stage and conceptions, there is an apparent correlation indicating that as reflective judgment stage (i.e. reflective thinking ability) increases, conceptions are more prevalent in a student account, which could imply a depth of understanding in this apparent correlation.

The link between conceptions and reflective judgment can be shown qualitatively. Some responses to the phenomenographic interview can be compared against the respondent's reflective judgment stage to reveal ways of understanding the meaning of the learning experience during the regional academic travel trip. The following quotes are from themes from each of the

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four conceptions compared against reflective judgment interview responses:

Student P1 also spoke of a connection between his formal learning and learning on the public health trip (Conception 1):

"I kind of self-studied public health...Many online courses many direct readings by myself...there is a limit of how much you can learn from books and not from experience. I really loved the fact that I was able to connect a lot of that information...to the experience that we had in Ethiopia itself. So when it comes to broader understanding...it is definitely a must, going to these places and actually being able to experience what you've been learning and not just leave it written theory." (P1)

Student P1's capacity for uncertainty is evident in his ability to pursue further inquiry from a variety of sources, including formal, informal, and self-directed learning sources. This indicates stage 6 reflective thinking, and can be compared to his RJI response above (page 100).

Student E7 stated that the EfSI trip affected his future approach to academic reading (Conception 2):

"...if you are reading off a textbook it's just sometimes -- like you know it's just truth, and I'm just taking it in. But now, the good thing is it actually makes you question twice, and I think that makes it a richer learning experience where you are not just taking in everything but you're actually thinking about it, like, 'OK, you know what, that's actually true,' or 'maybe that's not quite true, that doesn't quite apply yet.'" (E7)

Student E7's response shows his capacity for knowledge uncertainty, and this is based on a tendency to probably rely on ambiguous evidence. The above quote is indicative of reflective thinking stage 4, and can be compared against one of his RJI responses:

"When you say climate change it's a very broad subject...and there are just the ones that we see. We don't see the ones that happened 100 years down the line, when the sea levels rise, and all these things change. These are just the facts." (Ibid.)

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Student P7 spoke of the challenge to gather data for an assignment (Conception 2):

“...because we don’t speak the same language and it’s very hard to get in touch with those people, and we didn’t believe that it will have the huge outcome. Because like in the beginning I was just like, “No, it’s very hard, even if we do it, it’s not going to like make some conclusion or something.” But I was surprised how it actually ... I didn’t expect the assignment will actually help to make some outcome, make some evidence of what we did.” (P7)

Student P7, according to the analysis, is a stage 4 reflective thinker, and the above quote shows an embrace of knowledge uncertainty, but arguments relative to this thinking are a bit ambiguous. This can be compared to her RJI response above (page 96) that evidences a grasp for uncertainty, but a somewhat ambiguous argument for a knowledge claim

Student P3 talked about the impact the trip to Ethiopia had on her future plans (Conception 3):

“I’m studying medicine, I want to do this for the rest of my life. I never want to see somebody and assume, oh, it’s x, y, z. So I am currently talking courses on how to do that as well formally in health care. So it really affected how aware I choose to be, if that makes sense.” (P3)

The above quotation expresses Student P3’s hope not to make assumptions. However, her point of choosing to be aware suggests a reliance on her own personal opinions, suggesting a stage 3 reflective thinking ability. She has potential to expand her reflective thinking capacity based the above quote, which can be compared to her RJI response earlier in this chapter (page 95) to evidence stage 3 reflective thinking.

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Student E3 discussed how the EfSI trip affected his personal view of success and his future plans (Conception 3):

"I felt accomplished, I felt I actually succeeded, but there was no money in it. There was nothing, there was no financial returns from it, but just the results were totally unexpected. I wasn't expecting to...have those people say all these kind words and hug us at the end and cry. So that's how I look at success like it's not always you personally, it's what you do to the other people...some people still have the first definition of success where they're just running around, trying to get good jobs and well-paid jobs... I can't say no, I don't want to get a good job and well-paid job because then I'd be lying, but still I don't want to be stuck in that kind of lifestyle... I want something; the combination of both makes total sense to me. This is success, making those people happy. Making money is success but like combining both, for me that would be the perfect combination." (E3)

Student E3's response above indicates stage 4 reflective thinking in that he claims to have a definition for success and is open to the possible uncertainties in the future, but he contrasts his argument with ambiguous evidence regarding the definition of success. This way of thinking mirrors his RJI response earlier (page 97) in which he presents a compelling point of view, but lacks the evidence to fully realize his argument, instead relying on personal experience as his evidence.

Student E1 explained how he felt he impacted the community in Sri Lanka, and how their problems are similar to other places:

"...one of the things I felt was this sense of peculiarity in the problems that we are facing because prior to that and prior to traveling abroad, I thought most of the problems that I see back home, are just local, and that people in other countries do not face those problems. But when I went to trips like the one in Sri Lanka, I got to see the problems are fundamentally just the same. Even issues like poverty and those basic needs that we all need. They face similar problems and in some aspects worse and in other aspects better." (E1)

Student E1's response above exemplifies a slightly lower level of reflective thinking. His assumption is since he saw similarities in Sri Lanka (and other trips) to his home country, then this must be universal. This way of thinking is definitely in the pre-reflective level, and would arguably be stage 2 or 3. The reason why I would say it is stage 3 is because of the context of his other responses, which have all been around stage 3. His RJI response earlier in this chapter (page 95) suggests thinking that is a bit more certain than uncertain.

Student P5 reflected on the impact the regional academic travel trip had on him and his learning:

"this is a very flexible shifting situation at NYUAD, it forces us to self-reflect a lot because there a clear blue-print for this University and for the future of this University and the program itself is very self-reflecting...And so, I think what the experience of Ethiopia kind of pushed us to do -- being agents of change for other people is to try to understand in a more global level -- because when we are reflecting [at NYUAD] on a micro-level, it doesn't work, how do we develop in the future? There it really made us think of, I'm coming from a world, or the place I'm coming from, with the background I have, how can I apply that to situations like these in the future?" (P5)

The above passage shows a maturity of thinking that leaves the possibility open for application of different outcomes across different contexts, and is consistent with stage 6 reflective thinking. This passage can be compared to his RJI response earlier (page 101) to see an advanced level of reflective thinking.

4.4 Summary of Findings

The findings above indicate a relationship between higher levels of reflective thinking and more instances of conceptions. These conceptions, coupled with reflective thinking ability, suggest that students with higher reflective thinking abilities also possess a greater depth of understanding, since the instances of conceptions suggest the ability to reflect in a more meaningful way, increasing the possibility of gaining a better understanding of

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the learning lifeworld of the student. The findings suggest patterns linking higher reflective thinking abilities with the manifestation of conceptions, leading to a deeper account of experience, which in turn can enlighten our understanding of the learning lifeworld. These findings are now used to discuss how literature presented in the second chapter can be compared against the results of this research.

Chapter 5 – Discussion and Conclusions

This chapter discusses the results of my research in relation to the literature discussed in the second chapter. This research has produced interesting findings that affect lifeworld theory (more specifically the learning lifeworld), Transformative Learning Theory (TLT), and Short-term Study Abroad (STSA) research.

The findings of this research show that students experienced regional academic travel at NYU Abu Dhabi in at least four qualitatively different ways, forming conceptions of learning experiences. These conceptions, combined with students' reflective judgment stages, suggest that a better understanding of a student's learning lifeworld can be achieved by understanding the reflective thinking ability of each student, thereby increasing the likelihood of a more authentic account of a student's experience and giving a closer glimpse into a student's learning lifeworld. Also, the ability for students to critically reflect on their experience – through the determination of reflective judgment stage – is linked to entering the student's learning lifeworld, and a way to explore the transformative learning potential of these experiences.

This chapter is divided into six sections. The first section is a discussion of the findings of this research and contributions this research has made to learning lifeworld theory, transformative learning, and short-term study abroad research. The second section discusses practice implications for NYU Abu Dhabi's Office of Global Education and presents four recommendations for future regional academic travel trips. The third section outlines the significance of this research as it relates to theory, practice, and research approach. The fourth section is a presentation of the limitations of this research followed by the fifth section offering recommendations for further research. The final section offers concluding insights on the entire thesis.

5.1 Discussion of Findings

The second chapter of this thesis presented and critiqued literature that served to frame and inform this research. The three areas of inquiry: learning lifeworld, transformative learning theory, and short-term study abroad are presented below, each area comprising two topics. First, a discussion of the

relationship of the research results to the specific area of inquiry will be presented, followed by a discussion of the contributions this research makes to that area of inquiry, including learning lifeworld, transformative learning, and short-term study abroad.

5.1.1 Learning Lifeworld

5.1.1.1 Research results and the learning lifeworld. In the second chapter of this thesis, lifeworld theory – especially the theory of communicative action put forward by Habermas – was argued as most appropriate for this research. Lifeworld theory, according to Habermas (1984, 1987) is focused more on language and social interaction to explain one's interaction with the world around them. This deeper understanding of a person's relationship to the world around them is the cornerstone of Habermas' lifeworld theory. Conceptions of learning experiences represent the ways students understand the phenomenon of regional academic travel at NYU Abu Dhabi. These conceptions capture the meaning that collectively was made during the regional academic travel trips.

Through the analysis of individual accounts through to the development of conceptions, this process mirrors Habermas' arguments on lifeworld theory by presenting a social and collective context for individual experiences. Through this research, "we grasp the structure of individual lifeworlds only through communication experienced in a social context (Habermas, 1996 as cited in Gross, 2010, p. 121). The second-order nature of conceptions is intersubjective, constituting the various ways of experiencing a phenomenon, and therefore forming a social context for each individual lifeworld. However, the development of conceptions is only one step in confirming that the individual accounts provided by students could be considered authentic. In the case of my research, students shared their accounts of the regional academic travel experience.

Both reflective judgment and the capacity to conceive one's learning in broad terms thus both constitute a communicative act. Habermas' lifeworld theory is one in which the system of social integration and cultural knowledge renewal is formed through a collection of intersubjective individual experiences. Habermas and Fultner (2002) further explained this as a theory

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of communicative competence, which requires two levels of communication: an intersubjectivity level where people talk with one another, and a level of objects (or states of affairs) about which they communicate (p. 74).

Phenomenography is one possible way of searching for the limited number of intersubjective (second-order) meanings in a learning experience, and the searching is done through utterances, which is a unit of language understanding used by both phenomenographers in their search for structures and meanings of learning experiences, and Habermas in his theories of communicative action and communicative competence. Reflective judgment is also a kind of communicative action, where individual reflective thinking abilities are applied to a standard ill-structured problem.

A key determinant in understanding this account best is to assess its authenticity. Some scholars of phenomenography have argued that the phenomenographic interview and subsequent phenomenographic analysis alone, if structured properly, can probe deeply enough to yield more authentic accounts of understanding and experience (Walsh, 2000). However, Ashworth & Lucas (1998) argue that phenomenography falls short of understanding students' lived experience through the establishment of authorised conceptions that seek to favour theoretical structures and interpretations taking researchers away from the lifeworld (p. 421). Furthermore, phenomenographic research emphasizes the presuppositions of research and findings from prior studies, which also serve to distract the researcher from entering the lifeworld of participants.

The results of my research add weight to Ashworth & Lucas' argument. The relationship between stages of reflective judgment and instances of conceptions in students' interview accounts points to a possibility that phenomenography alone might not fully capture lived experience. My research argues that focusing on reflective thinking ability, which includes critical reflection, could be a way to understand how students have been able to authentically reflect on their experience. Knowing a student's reflective thinking ability alone does not automatically grant access to their learning lifeworld. However, reflective thinking ability applied to conceptions of learning experiences yields an added dimension of understanding that could get us closer to accessing the learning lifeworld. The connection between the

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language used in individual accounts to develop conceptions matched with a student's reflective judgment stage yields a compelling argument that access to the learning lifeworld for the phenomenon of regional academic travel is possible through the development of conceptions paired with the authenticity of account clarified by determining students' reflective thinking ability.

Language is the key mode of communication in this study. An important factor to consider is that whilst all of the students interviewed communicated in English, English is not the native language for most of the students interviewed in this study. It is important to note that this study is focused on meaning and not on language patterns. Students would have had to show proficiency in English in order to gain admission to NYU Abu Dhabi, and therefore being a non-native speaker is less of a factor since the goal of this study is to illicit meaning from what has been said. These meanings can be extracted from a student account whether the student is a native speaker or a non-native speaker of English through the use of phenomenographic analysis, which demand preservation of the meaning of utterances.

For those students displaying higher levels of reflective judgment and capacity to conceive their learning on a broad basis it was clear that the interactions that had occurred during their regional academic travel contributed to these capacities to conceive and judge. Students used examples from their experience of regional academic travel in conceptualising their learning and in responses that manifested higher levels of reflective judgment (as seen in Section 4.3). Such travel entails exposure to people with different ways of seeing and experiencing the world, and to the recognition that learning can make a difference to others. McLaughlin & Johnson (2006) wrote of the need for faculty to develop curriculum that stresses interdependence of humanity. They posited, "All students, in any discipline, could then take, at some juncture in their undergraduate career path, a course that will open their eyes to the interconnected world in which they live" (p. 76).

In conclusion, it is clear that there are ways here in which higher levels of reflective judgement are associated with capacity on the part of the student to offer a broader conceptual account of his or her own learning. What is important, though, is not simply an understanding that there is a connection, but an appreciation for the nature of this relationship entailed.

5.1.1.2 Contributions to lifeworld theory. The results of my research, as discussed above, could advance the idea of the learning lifeworld as a means to better understand how students experience their learning, ranging from learning in the classroom to learning outside of the classroom (i.e., academic travel). My research could also be part of the continuing discussion on how lifeworld theory can better inform phenomenographic research started by Lucas (1998), and Ashworth & Lucas (1998, 2000) by using both phenomenography and the reflective judgment model as a starting point for researching authenticity of student experiences in other contexts beyond the regional academic travel trip that served as the setting for this research. For example, my research has explored bracketing, both in the stating of my position relative to the research, and in research results. For example, Student P1, when asked about his learning expectations before the regional academic travel trip, stated

“...I really tried to disassociate me -- I kept my expectations always unnoticed, by myself, given that -- how could I explain that? I wanted the trip to surprise me and for that reason I decided not to have expectations.” (P1)

This student's bracketing of presuppositions indicates a high level of critical reflection, is supported by his high level (Stage 6) of reflective thinking, and exemplifies how a higher level of reflective thinking is linked to understanding of the learning lifeworld.

5.1.2 Transformative Learning Theory

5.1.2.1 Research results and transformative learning theory.

Possible transformative learning can begin with the students who were determined to have Stage 6 reflective thinking. If higher reflective judgment scores produces a higher likelihood of authenticity in account, then transformations could be evident in the interviews. For instance, Student E6, when discussing how his worldview may have changed as a result of the trip, couldn't quite describe effect the trip had on him, but the trip did change him. He said:

“...I don’t exactly know how to describe it, it’s much more emotional than it is, than I can say it in words, but [the trip to Sri Lanka] changed me a lot in a significant way” (E6).

To better understand the context of this quote above, Student E6 described his limited knowledge of what to expect during the trip:

“...when we went there, we didn’t have too much of an idea what it’s going to be. They told us we’re going to be helping and we’re going to be constructing things.” (E6)

The above quotes could point to a change in outlook on life, which could be considered transformative. What is important in this assertion is that students were interviewed six to eight months after participation in the regional academic travel trip. Mezirow (2000) indicated that transformations can take place when there is a variation of the meaning around self-examination of feelings (p. 22). Student E6 may not have had a lot of prior expectations before participating in the trip, which may explain why he felt the trip changed him so significantly.

Additionally, Student P1, even more than Student E6, spoke of how the experience affected his learning. Student P1 spoke of a continuing interest in looking at the intersection of science and community health. Later in the interview, he talked about how he discovered there was a research institute studying tropical diseases near the social centre he visited, and this was an opportunity for him to apply for a research internship to explore his interests in science and community development. His language was not necessarily one of a major shift in his outlook or his life plan, but the experience of finding a research internship in an area that merges his two interests could at the very least be quite impactful. Again, this meets criteria for transformations based on exploration of new roles and options in one’s life (*Ibid.*).

Student P5 also spoke a lot about how the public health trip affected his learning and his worldview in impactful ways. He is a well-travelled person and therefore looked at the trip to Ethiopia as another piece of the mosaic of his experience. What was interesting was his choice of words in describing this nuanced change:

"I didn't have this huge revelation of all my life has changed, but I think Ethiopia was just the one piece of evidence that kind of just fit into the theory I'm developing of the world right now... I don't think it was a change [in my worldview], I think it was just an added dimension." (P5)

This "added dimension" he mentioned, although downplayed, could point to an impact that was enough to be transformative. It may be true that the regional academic travel trip didn't change his entire world, but it did add something to his world that wasn't there before.

These three students show possibility of transformative learning, but their language was more nuanced, and therefore more information might be needed from them to determine if indeed their experience was transformative.

For the other eleven students, there were various passages from their interview that pointed to a possible transformative learning experience. Most experiences were position, but there was at least one student (P4) who felt uncomfortable being put in the situation of asking locals about their own stories. The quotes below (one from each of the remaining eleven students) could point to a potential for transformative learning:

"...that took our learning to a completely different level. So we were actually able to see it in context, see it in reality, while beforehand it was just talking." (P2)

"And I thought, 'Oh, my god, I don't feel so helpless anymore. There is somebody trying to give better services, trying to make sure that Ethiopians can receive good service and non-Ethiopians alike. So that was very, that really changed a lot of things for me about how I see being [in Ethiopia] and going to the hospital [in Ethiopia]." (P3)

"My focus on technology has shifted. I've used to think of ways to help people by using technology and now my focus is trying to help people without the use of much technology." (E2)

"It was the beginning of feeling that, at least what I'm learning has a real impact in the world." (E1)

“...sometimes you felt like a disconnection from the people that you were talking to. They were very openly sharing their stories, but sometimes it just made you feel bad because you couldn't relate to them. You just felt like some -- aloof scholar that's coming in and then – but very just passionately engaging with them and I guess that position made me uncomfortable.” (P4)

“...something where I can have an impact on people, make them happy, make their life better but still not just because I want to be successful or make money, so just as a connection of both that's how my whole future plan changed after that trip.” (E3)

“In a class you're in an AC, air conditioned room where you're learning something and [in Sri Lanka] you are kind of in a really, really, really hot sun and et cetera...It was kind of eye-opening because it's like, 'Okay, this is engineering,' different people from different places and they all have different branches or areas of interest and all come together and are like... 'Okay, we should do this and do that to make this easier, to make this more efficient, etc.' (E4)

“I learned for myself and by myself. And it was pretty amazing because I like doing the physical work and it really engaged me. I think trip really gave a different side of being an engineer that not everybody takes into consideration.” (E5)

“Right now, I just do appreciate all of the things that I have, because before [the trip to Ethiopia] I didn't actually pay attention. I took everything for granted whatever I have, but after the trip, I just started to look at the world through different eyes.” (P6)

“I think this trip had a big effect on changing my perception in disease and how that impacts life and the importance of not getting involved in sort of the negative aspect that is attached to certain diseases.” (P7)

“...[the trip to Sri Lanka] gives a whole new dimension to education I think. The whole academic experience [at NYU Abu Dhabi] because it is not just what you learn on books and papers but how you actually apply that in the field, and how sometimes the stuff you learn in books looks completely irrelevant in the field...so it just makes you think deeper into whatever you are learning and yeah, it just gives it more depth.” (E7)

The above quotes on their own may not represent transformative learning, but taken in the context of the overall interviews, there is a high probability that some degree of critical reflection on assumptions has taken place, leading to the likelihood of transformative learning. All students, no matter what level of reflective thinking ability they hold, could have a transformative learning experience, be it related directly to their formal learning in the classroom or more general in their university experience, or related more broadly to their outlook on life. A key determinant in transformative learning is critical reflection on one's assumptions (Mezirow, 1998; Baumgartner, 2012), and it is evident from the quotes above that there has been some shifting of previously held assumptions, increasing the probability for transformative learning as a result of these regional academic travel trips.

The 14 students who participated in this study are from various cultural backgrounds, including South America, Africa, Europe, the Middle East, Central and South Asia, and Oceania. Does this variation produce differences in propensity for critical reflection? According to Mezirow (1999), TLT encompasses constructive learning, which affords the learner the ability to be self-directed, with the ability to participate in collaborative discourse and to become capable of exercising individual agency and to act reflectively. Cultural differences, therefore, are incorporated in the generation of the learning experience through the self-directed (and therefore self-reflective) context of learning, which is further corroborated by the reflective judgment stage results.

A sub-theme emerges from the passages above and the key foci developed from the individual student profiles, indicating that students were

engaging in some kind of critical self-reflection in relation to the regional academic travel trip. The administration of the RJI yielded an understanding of students' reflective thinking across all students interviewed. However, there were a couple of students who showed direct critical self –reflection in their interview, especially in relation to their ability to understand their effect on a community and the world, which warranted the creation of this theme. The most direct example quotation for this theme came from Student P5, whose quote on self-reflection was referenced in the individual profile foci.

5.1.2.2 Contributions to transformative learning theory. Given the links between reflective judgment and TLT as described earlier in this thesis, my research furthers the possibility that this link exists. Subsequent research looking at the link between transformative learning and increased levels of reflective thinking could be beneficial. Kitchener and King (1990) directly wrote of this link by linking critical reflection to reflective thinking, which was validated by Mezirow (1998), but there has not been a more recent account further validating this link.

Phenomenographic research does not directly link to transformative learning, but some studies used phenomenographic research methodologies in examining transformative learning potentials in educational settings (Le Cornu, 2005; Rogers et al., 2007). Conceptions represent the variation of ways of experiencing a phenomenon. Therefore, conceptions are not transformative on their own. Bowden's (2000) developmental phenomenography, stressed utilisation of the findings to improve learning. My research offers recommendations for the improvement of practice, discussed later in this chapter, to help improve learning experiences.

5.1.3 Short-term Study Abroad

5.1.3.1 Research results and short-term study abroad research.

The review of STSA literature in the second chapter (page 15) showed how varied the research can be. As this research is most concerned with learning on an STSA trip, this discussion will focus on that particular section of the literature. McLaughlin & Johnson (2006) wrote about the field course experiential learning model – a three-step model (pre-trip preparation, trip, and post-trip synthesis) for a research-based STSA program, which could be

compared to the regional academic travel trips to Ethiopia and Sri Lanka at NYU Abu Dhabi. McLaughlin & Johnson (2006) suggested that assessing these journal entries is a good way to assess students understanding of the link between what they see in the field and what they have experienced in the classroom. Students interviewed for this research did make some linkages between what they were learning in the field and what they have learned in the classroom (discussed in the results as Conception 1), but it was more of a recommendation than a structured part of the regional academic travel trips. The two NYU Abu Dhabi trips did not have a required journal component. This was confirmed during the interviews based on a direct question asked of the students on whether they kept a journal during the regional academic travel trip. Larson, Ott, & Miles (2010) argued that reflective writing on a cultural immersion trip for undergraduate nursing students enhanced student self-awareness. Journal writing and assessment of that journal will be discussed later in this chapter on recommendations for practice.

The results of my research, by showing qualitatively different ways students have experienced these academic trips, could suggest that the variation in experience has less to do with geographic context. Allen (2010) researched two students who took the same STSA language trip in France. She argued that study abroad research (and in turn STSA research) simplifies the notion of setting as a context for understanding transformative learning potential, and she argues for a more relational view of context where learning is based on individual engagement rather than using the setting itself as the context for learning. Allen's approach is supported by my research through the efforts to capture the individual differences in learning whilst not focusing as much on the location or setting as a frame. This means that within a regional academic travel trip, or across trips, context is shaped more by the framing of the program than the setting.

In further exploration of framing as the driver of learning in STSA experiences, Coryell (2013) suggested that adult education theories (i.e., reflection on action, transformative learning) should be incorporated into STSA instructional design. This approach is supported by the results of my research by suggesting transformative learning as a result of STSA learning, and arguing that reflective thinking ability is key to better understanding not

only authenticity of account, but the learning potential of the experience. One contradiction between Allen and Coryell is that Coryell uses situated cognition – which argues that context plays a central role in learning – directly countering Allen’s assertions that context should not play a central role. In my research, context (e.g. location) plays less of a role in learning than program framing. In other words, the structure and organization of the regional academic travel trip played a greater role in affecting learning outcomes than the location of the trip. The above discussion does not settle the framing/context argument, but it opens a continuing conversation about how learning can be improved and assessed in STSA experiences.

5.1.3.2 Contributions to short-term study abroad research. The results of my research contribute to STSA research by offering an in-depth understanding of the qualitative ways students experience a short-term study abroad trip. This research refutes the out-dated notion that program duration is a measure of quality. Program design and structure, as argued by most of the STSA research on learning, is more important than program duration. The terminology used at NYU Abu Dhabi for STSA programs suggests that these programs could be renamed in a similar way to regional academic travel, thereby removing the value laden term “short-term”, which connotes a program that might be less valued than a program that is long-term or removes the time-based concept altogether.

This research also stresses the need to bracket presuppositions by the researcher when it comes to STSA research, which could be achieved through the use of methodologies such as phenomenography and grounded theory, which tend to focus on the interview data as the primary driver for shaping results, leaving the possibilities open for the individual responses to colour the findings rather than the predisposition of the researcher. These methodologies do not presume the bracketing of presuppositions, but there are arguments in the research canon (especially in phenomenography) that researcher suspension of preconceived outcomes is key to a successful research outcome.

5.2 Practice Implications for NYU Abu Dhabi's Office of Global Education

The above sections in this chapter focused on the impact of this research on key areas of inquiry involved in the framing of this study. NYU Abu Dhabi's Office of Global Education has designed and offered the two regional academic travel trips that are the focus of this research. The following section offers five suggestions to the Office of Global Education to improve these trips. While these suggestions are practical in nature, they will be discussed in the context of both the research results and the literature. The five suggestions are: 1. More structure and assessment of learning activities during the trip, 2. Encourage diversity of academic major or concentration, 3. Arrange (if possible) for an NYU Abu Dhabi student, staff, or faculty who is a native of the destination country to participate in the trip, 4. Organize a cultural experience in the destination country upon arrival, and 5. Hold pre-departure field research skills sessions for the students.

5.2.1 Structure and Assessment of Learning Activities

During both regional academic travel trips, students were required to complete a group assignment, which usually took the form of a presentation at the end of the week. These assignments helped students bring their skills, knowledge, and experience together. However, there were other opportunities, particularly in the keeping of a journal, which could be used as a further tool for assessment of learning. Brandt & Manley (2002) encouraged the use of a field book for students spending a semester studying abroad. This field book was developed as an assessment tool, and encompassed diverse writing assignments that students completed over the semester abroad. Given that regional academic travel trips are typically only a week in duration, a modified version of the field book could be employed to help assess each student's learning, and do so from their own worlds, possibly resulting in a better understanding of the student lifeworld.

The combination of conceptions and reflective judgment could be instrumental in structuring a regional academic travel trip with a strong impact on student learning. The learning lifeworld metaphor could be used to address

students' learning needs, and the conceptions devised could be used to develop key goals for a trip. Furthermore, reflective judgment interviews paired with phenomenographic interviews could be administered upon return from the trip to help the Office of Global Education gauge student reflective thinking ability against conceptions of learning experiences.

The regional academic travel trips are not a required element of the NYU Abu Dhabi curriculum. However, more formal recognition of student participation – perhaps in the form of modest student credit, or an official grade listing on the academic transcript – could help in assessing student learning, and offer tangible information on learning outcomes for the Office of Global Education. Sachau, Brasher, & Fee (2010) suggest the establishment of online communities as a venue for extending the time the trip might directly affect the student participant. The Office of Global Education could benefit twofold from establishing these online communities – students' learning would be extended beyond the trip itself, and the Office of Global Education could learn more about how students are learning during and after these trips.

5.2.2. Diversity of Academic Major or Concentration

Whilst the EfSI trip was comprised of only engineering students, many of the students came from different subspecialties of engineering such as civil, mechanical, and computer-based engineering. Students attending the public health trip were from a variety of academic majors, including science majors and social science majors from various academic majors and concentrations. The benefit of diversity of academic major or concentration was evident in the student accounts. For example, Student P1, a science major, discussed the benefits of working with a student from social science:

“And for me it was great just to be able to work with [the social science student], because he would fill those gaps of knowledge that I had when writing that, but for me it was great that it was a lot of diversity in terms of major.” (P1)

Student E4 talked of the benefit having different engineering subspecialties on the trip:

“It was kind of eye-opening because it’s like, ‘Okay, this is engineering,’ because different people from different places...all have different branches or areas of interest and you all come together...” (E4)

Olson & Lalley (2012) discussed the benefits of combining business and engineering majors on a short-term study abroad trip (n=101), justifying the combination based on the reality that business and engineering students would have to work together in their future careers, and this connection early in their academic careers would be a benefit. While there may be no formula for diversity in major or concentration, the evidence that diversity of academic background can enhance the regional academic travel experience is compelling. NYU Abu Dhabi is a school comprised of students from many different cultural backgrounds, nationalities, and experiences. The addition of academic diversity will only serve to strengthen the learning benefits of regional academic travel.

5.2.3 Destination Country Native Participants

On each regional academic travel trip studied in this research, there was one student who was a native of the destination country. For confidentiality reasons, this was not discussed in the results chapter, or in the student profiles. However, it was evident from responses from these native students and from other students who participated, that there was a clear benefit having an NYU Abu Dhabi student native to the destination country on the trip. This native student benefitted other students in a number of ways, including language translation, and bridging the cultural context of the destination country and the context of the university, thereby deepening the experience for students who were able to increase their depth of communication and cultural understanding. While it may not always be possible to identify a destination country native student (or former student participant) to participate in a regional academic travel trip, or an NYU Abu Dhabi staff or faculty member from the destination country, the participation of this person would be a benefit to other trip participants.

In my research, Student P2 expressed a bit of frustration that the intended meaning of their communication was not effectively translated:

“...sometimes that was the hardest task to also communicate with the translator correctly because I am not sure to what extent our questions were --. You know, the kind of frame of delicacy in question, how it was translated by the social worker from the centre.” (P2)

However, some students, such as Student E6, looked to his supervisor that was Sri Lankan as a way to better communicate with the villagers:

“...so our supervisor for our group was Sri Lankan, so obviously he could easily communicate with the villagers for us.” (E6)

Although some students struggled with communication via translation, some, like Student P6, talked about it as if it was a non-issue:

“And we communicated with them so I asked questions, translated, translated to the woman. And although it was tough but we still managed to get to that intimate conversation where they shared their own experience.” (P6)

Whilst there isn't a lot of literature to support this suggestion, Deans (2011) study of an undergraduate STSA trip of business students (sample size unknown) to China found one outcome of student learning was the ability for students who didn't understand Mandarin to interact with students who did study Mandarin, thereby leading to a richer understanding of their experience. The likelihood of a deeper experience is higher if a fellow student – or at least another member of the university traveling with the students – is a native of the destination country. This may not be possible at other universities, but could be possible at NYU Abu Dhabi given the diversity of nationalities among the entire university community.

5.2.4 Destination Country Cultural Activity

Given the short duration of NYU Abu Dhabi's regional academic travel trips, activities outside of the core experience may be difficult to arrange, but the benefit of organizing something as simple as a visit to a locally-based institution such as a museum, a place of worship, or a culturally significant place, would help students unfamiliar with the local culture and customs to better understand the local citizens. This recommendation is not meant to

replace the experience students had interacting with the local residents in Sri Lanka or Ethiopia, which served a very important learning outcome for many of the students who participated.

Student E2 expressed his wish to be able to get to know a little more of the surroundings in which he was working:

“The most challenging part of the experience, I would say it was more of the social part...It was a little tough. Because putting eight, nine hours and watching some of the mentors go... Yeah, I wanted to experience the local traditions... Or going to this little shop that they sold traditional masks, I just wanted to see what that was.” (E2)

Deans (2011) stressed the importance of “an array of cultural activities” planned during STSA experiences. The benefits of participating in cultural activities could serve a learning function and a needed rest from the intensity of the core learning experience (p. 198). Brandt & Manley (2002) stressed the importance of recording and reflecting upon experiences, thereby linking students’ learning with what they are seeing. The addition of a cultural activity on these regional academic travel trips would allow students to contextualize their learning by introducing them to the local culture. Also, Sachau, Brasher, & Fee (2010) suggested that pre-departure planning of cultural visits around core learning sites is key to the success of a shorter-term trip.

5.2.5 Pre-Departure Field Research Skills Sessions

Students who went on the EfSI and public health trips participated in pre-departure information sessions. These sessions could benefit students with more information on field-based research skills, such as interview techniques, data gathering, and protocols for ethnographic research, the primary research methodology encouraged on these two trips. Some research guidelines were presented in pre-departure information provided to students by the Office of Global Education, but a more direct session working with students on these skills would likely enhance their learning experiences during the trip. Montrose (2002) posited that the outcome of experiential learning (and, in this case of this research, field research) “is not in the activity itself, but the critical analysis of that activity that transforms the study abroad

program into a worthwhile academic experience” (p. 14). These skill sessions would offer students a base of understanding, and increase the chances of having a more impactful learning experience during the trip.

5.3 Significance of Research

This section touches on the contributions of this research to theory and practice, and to the research approach proposed. Whilst there are many studies on short-term study abroad programs like regional academic travel at NYU Abu Dhabi’s Office of Global Education, there are no studies that use a combination of phenomenography and reflective judgment to capture students’ lived experience the same way as this study. Additionally, there has been virtually no research done on global education at NYUAD, presenting an opportunity to yield original insights that could lead to further research on regional academic travel and other programs offered by the Office of Global Education. Finally, this research is also significant for phenomenography by enhancing understanding of lifeworld through phenomenography by giving us further information related to the authenticity of experience that could bring more meaning to the resulting conceptions.

5.3.1 Significance of Research to Theory

This research strives to advance research in lifeworld theory – in particular the learning lifeworld – by using existing research by Lucas (1998), Ashworth and Lucas (2000), and Ashworth (2004) on the learning lifeworld of students in a phenomenographic context. These studies have used Husserl’s theory of lifeworld, which is described as “the world that is constantly pre-given, valid constantly and in advance as existing” (Gross, 2010, p. 120). Husserl’s lifeworld theory is often the basis for the phenomenological school of psychological thought, which stressed the importance of understanding the essence of individual lived experience. Habermas (1984, 1987), through his theory of communicative action, argued that language is a fundamental component of society, and is the process through which people form their identities. Habermas’ believed that Husserl was in error founding lifeworld theory in individual consciousness, which can only result in lifeworlds that are inalienably individual, even though Husserl was interested in a socially-

focused universal lifeworld (1996, as cited in Gross, 2010, p. 121). Habermas believed that to address the social, one must “cross the line that separates a phenomenal description of the social lifeworld as such from the comprehension of every possible individual lifeworld, whether it be that of an individual or a social group (*Ibid.*).

Given the focus of this research on the learning lifeworld, rather than on lifeworld in general, Habermas’ lifeworld theory supports learning, which uses language and communication as its primary vehicle, with an emphasis on the influence of the social dimension (society, culture, language) on the individual. The focus of this research is more on the epistemological – or how students come to learn what they learn – justifying the use of phenomenography (through conceptions), reflective judgment (through reflective thinking), and transformative learning (through critical reflection). The pairing of phenomenography and reflective judgment could lead to more authenticity of account of one’s experience, leading to a better understanding of an individual’s learning lifeworld, and critical reflection – which identifies a link between reflective judgment and transformative learning – could determine if learning has been transformed.

5.3.2 Significance of Research to Practice

The results of this research directly inform practice at NYUAD’s Office of Global Education. Future iterations of EfSI and public health regional academic travel trips could be designed through student data compiled from this research to promote stronger learning outcomes. The data compiled could also inform the design of other types of programs, such as January term academic trips, faculty regional academic travel, and study abroad experience. This research could help shape the framing of other experiences by suggesting a proposed structure for Global Education experiences that emphasize learning outcomes based on the type of experience and the goals to be achieved. Also, the research approach for this study could be used to study other instances of the EfSI and public health trips, and other Global Education programs to determine if the research approach is helpful.

This research has also had a notable impact on my professional practice and personal learning. As a result of conducting this research, and

based on my interest in international education, I have shifted my career focus to career options in global education, be it administratively focused, academically focused, or both. I have found that combining my passion for travel and my interest in student study abroad learning experiences could be combined into a work running an office of global learning, or perhaps teaching a course on international higher education. I have learned a great deal about the impact travel learning experiences can have, and recognize that my own travels have been significant learning experiences that I can bring to the classroom and/or the workplace.

5.3.3 Significance of Research to Research Approach

A key part of this research is how authenticity of the account given by students can be determined, thereby allowing us to access to the learning lifeworld. When the framework for this research was developed, a review of the phenomenographic research approach was determined to be a good foundation for this research. However, phenomenography on its own relies on utterances of the individuals interviewed for accuracy and authenticity of data. Marton (1986) asserted that phenomenography is more interested in content of thinking than in psychology, making conceptions about people's view of the world rather than statements about the world in general (p. 32). If phenomenography is concerned with the content of people's view of the world, and the interview is the most common setting for gathering data for phenomenographic studies, how can this data be evaluated and trusted as an authentic account? Svensson (1997) asserted that the aim of phenomenography is "to both preserve the specific content of the phenomena in the description and to focus on some more fundamental characteristics" (p. 168). Conceptions, as Svensson argued in the same article, is "a relation between the individual and some part of the world" (*Ibid.*, p. 169), supporting the notion of lifeworld in phenomenographic research. Therefore, the key to effective phenomenographic research lies in the quality of the interview data collected. Proper question design and interviewing skills (i.e. effective open-ended questions as a follow up to initial questions) is a good step toward understanding a person's meaning in their account. However, if the goal of the interview is to gain a better understanding of the individual-world relation

(lifeworld), then more attention is needed in assessing the interviewee's ability or capacity to provide an authentic account of his or her experience.

Phenomenographic research assumes the *researcher* frames the study properly, asks the right questions, and analyses the data in a convincing way, yielding results can generate insight into one's learning. Yet if the entire premise of phenomenography, as stated above, is to understand the content of learning from a person's point of view, there could be a benefit, in addition to the responsibility of the researcher to develop and justify choices made in framing a research project, in determining the authenticity of responses given by participants during the phenomenographic interview?

This argument above led to the addition of the reflective judgment model in the research approach for this study. The reflective judgment model (King & Kitchener, 1994) is a seven-stage developmental model of reflective thinking ability. Reflective thinking, a subset of critical thinking, is defined as "the ways in which students (and others) reason about complex-ill-defined problems" (*Ibid.*, p. 12). Mezirow (1998) linked higher levels of reflective thinking to higher levels of critical reflection, and the ability to critical reflect on one's own experience could more readily yield insight into one's learning lifeworld possibly offering a more authentic account of one's experiences.

The research approach for this study has been devised with the aim of utilizing existing theories and models to gain further access into a student's learning lifeworld. This approach could have significance for studies similar to this research examining student learning experiences. This approach does not discount the entire field of phenomenography, rather it challenges aspects of the research approach that serve to inform future phenomenographic research.

5.4 Limitations of This Research

The findings and conclusions of this research are limited by three identified factors: The number and type of regional academic travel trips chosen for this research, the size of the sample, and my position and choices as a developing practitioner-researcher.

5.4.1 Number And Type Of Regional Academic Travel Trips

The two trips chosen for this research represent different types of trips that have been designed and developed by NYU Abu Dhabi's Office of Global Education. Another type of regional academic travel is faculty-led course-related travel, which could certainly be explored in future research related to this subject (see recommendations section below), but the focus of this research is the types of trips for which the Office of Global Education has direct involvement in developing. This decision has kept the choice of programs limited, whilst allowing for practice recommendations that could directly impact future regional academic travel trips, both future instances of EfSI and public health, and newly designed programs based on the model of these two programs. The two regional academic travel trips represent two of the more significant programs that have benefitted from direct involvement from the Office of Global Education. Faculty and subject matter experts were consulted to assist in the design both the EfSI program and the public health program, but the final decision for the framing and design of the program remained with the Office of Global Education. It is possible that the findings of this research could be applied to other programs, but that possibility is secondary to the enhancement of future iterations of EfSI and public health.

5.4.2 Sample Size

Seven participants from each trip responded positively for involvement in this research. In total, 28 students attended the March 2014 EfSI trip, and 14 students attended the March 2014 public health trip. Whilst seven students from each group represent a different percentage of the overall trip participants, the key for this research was to get enough of a sample size to show qualitative variation and saturation. Cousin (2009) wrote, "there is no magic sample size in phenomenographic research" (p. 192). Similarly, Seidman (2013) posited that there is no number that determines a good or bad study (p. 58). Given the small number of total participants for each trip, saturation of data supporting the development of conceptions and the overall findings for this study within the chosen context was achieved.

5.4.3 My Choices As A Developing Practitioner-Researcher

I am a researcher new to phenomenography as a research orientation. Some phenomenographic studies, as discussed by Bowden (2000) and Walsh (2000), have used teams to analyse data as a means to mitigate individual bias. However, Walsh (2000) claims that team analysis brings in the varying levels of expertise of the individual researchers, and potential multiple biases of researchers that could also cloud the findings. I chose the approach of individually analysing the data in an effort to maintain confidentiality of such a small data set, and as a means to better understand the context of utterances since I was the sole interviewer of all 14 students. My knowledge of the context of interview data allowed the analysis to remain as true as possible to the original intent of meaning.

Additionally, the reliance on Habermas (1984, 1987) and his theory of communicative action as the foundation for lifeworld theory in this research could be seen as a narrow lens of lifeworld theory. Habermas broke from his predecessors Husserl and Schütz by describing lifeworld theory from a social perspective rather than an individual perspective. This led to my reliance on language as a way to better understand (and potentially enter) the learning lifeworld. This is not as much a limitation as it is a delimiter to frame this research.

This was also my first time conducting reflective judgment interviews. While the questions for the RJI are standard, the scoring is usually done by two trained raters. In this research, my supervisor and I performed scoring, which have led to results and conclusions that are framed by these scores. My supervisor and I engaged in active deliberations to come to an agreed upon final rating, but the research could be seen as limiting since neither of us are experienced RJI raters.

Finally, I attempted to maintain an open position throughout the course of performing this research. During data analysis, following Åkerlind's (2005) suggestion, I attempted not to come to conclusions too quickly during analysis by looking for general meaning during the initial reading of the interview transcripts. This ensured meaning and context would be driven by the words of the students and not by my own presuppositions.

5.5 Recommendations for Further Research

5.5.1 Phenomenography, Reflective Judgment, and the Learning Lifeworld

The methodology used in this study could be used in future studies to determine if the results are replicable and applicable to other settings and contexts. This methodology could be used for other regional academic travel experiences, or other study abroad experiences at NYU Abu Dhabi to test the findings of this research. The usage of phenomenography and reflective judgment could be used at different time periods as well. For example, before travel commences, the RJI could be administered to students in order to get a baseline measure of reflective thinking ability, and the interview could be administered after the trip along with the phenomenographic interview to see if there is any change in reflective thinking. Bryman (2009) stressed the need to consider timeline and order of conducting research projects, which may affect results (p. 526). In the case of research on the learning lifeworld, and the need to bracket presuppositions as per Ashworth & Lucas (1998, 2000), caution is needed when performing any prior research that could colour the findings of a study.

5.5.2 Transformative Learning

A number of studies have examined the connection between study abroad and transformative learning. However, there has not been any specific research done at NYU Abu Dhabi on this topic. NYU Abu Dhabi has a diverse group of students from many nationalities and cultural backgrounds, in addition to students who have done an extensive amount of traveling in their young lives, whilst others have not travelled as much. Further research could be done with the Office of Global Education, such as a longitudinal study, that examines the transformative learning potential of January term courses, semester (or longer) study abroad trips, or other regional academic travel trips. These trips and experiences could be part of a larger study on their transformative potential, or each trip could be studied on its own. Furthermore, students participating in regional academic travel for the first time could be compared against students who have participated in other trips.

Another approach to looking at transformative learning in regional academic travel is the concept of self-authorship. Baxter Magolda (2002) defines self-authorship as “constructing one’s own internal self-definition to guide one’s life and relations with others in the context of external influence” (p. 3). Self-authorship relies on the individual to define his or her own beliefs, identities, and social orientations (King et al., 2009). The assumption of self-authorship is that an individual has advanced knowledge in reflective thinking, critical reflection, and self-awareness. As self-authorship is not explored significantly in this study, there is an opportunity to further study self-authorship in the context of STSA experiences, transformative learning experiences, and other research on student learning, providing a different perspective from the one given in this study.

5.5.3 Further Research On Regional Academic Travel

Regional academic travel is a term for a type of short-term study abroad program that exists at NYU Abu Dhabi. It is possible that future research on these programs could pave the way for a shift in the lexicon on STSA. As argued in this research, program duration is not a marker of quality, yet the term short-term study abroad is delineated from general study abroad research by its duration. If the term regional academic travel was introduced as an alternative term, as argued earlier, these trips could be examined in the context of their own benefits rather than in the context of a study abroad program that is shorter and less impactful.

5.6 Conclusions

This thesis has examined two regional academic travel trips at New York University Abu Dhabi’s Office of Global Education. My research has presented the qualitatively different ways in which students experienced these trips, expressed as conceptions of learning experiences, combined with reflective thinking abilities to determine how best we may attempt to understand the authentic experience of the student, which has been termed the learning lifeworld.

ACCESSING THE LEARNING LIFEWORLD

The findings of my research have contributed to new knowledge through a phenomenographic methodology, yielding four conceptions of how students have experienced these regional academic travel trips: The first conception looked at how students experienced the regional academic travel trip as complementing or supplementing their classroom learning; the second conception, which is broader than the first conception, was how academic skills such as problem-solving, teamwork, and the discovery of innovation were developed as a result of participation on the trip; the third conception, which is broader than both the first and second conception, exhibited how the regional academic travel experience affected students' future academic, personal, and professional endeavours; and the fourth conception, which is the broadest conception, revealed how the regional academic travel trip offered students a chance to reflect on impacts they have made and could make in a community and the world. These conceptions, logically connected to one another as connected yet distinct parts of the learning lifeworld, were then compared against reflective thinking ability for each student. The higher the stage of reflective thinking, the greater the instances of conceptions evident in the data, suggesting that higher levels of reflective thinking could be linked to a deeper understanding of a student's experience by both the student and the researcher, thereby allowing us to access the learning lifeworld of a student. In addition to the above insight, the additional insights listed below have addressed the research questions for this study:

- There were key learning differences between students who have participated in these regional academic travel trips. These learning differences depended on a number of factors, and these factors were captured in categories of description, and finally in conceptions of learning experiences;
- Framing of these learning experiences was more important to learning than context (i.e. geographic location), and have been emphasized as a recommendation for practice. In other words, the location of a regional academic travel trip is less important to the learning experience than the structure of the trip;

ACCESSING THE LEARNING LIFEWORLD

- Prior research suggests a link between reflective thinking ability and transformative learning, and this research has continued the conversation by linking reflective thinking ability to authenticity of a student account of learning experiences. The closer we can get to understanding the learning lifeworld, the better the potential for understanding transformative learning; and
- The conceptions of learning experience developed in this research support the recommendations for practice to NYU Abu Dhabi's Office of Global Education. The conceptions could be a guide for developing and improving design of future regional academic travel at NYU Abu Dhabi.

In its entirety, this research presented has contributed to the practices and theories of learning. This has been achieved through the exploration of an original object of inquiry, a review of related areas of inquiry, an original methodology combining existing theories and models, and results that yield insights into the fields of short-term study abroad research, transformative learning, lifeworld theory, phenomenography, and regional academic travel at New York University Abu Dhabi. The research reflects a substantial, original, and informative piece of practitioner research that advances the conversation on student learning, and could serve as a foundation for further inquiry on how we may find better ways of understanding, and possibly accessing, the learning lifeworld.

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Appendix A: Ethical Approval Forms, University of Liverpool



Dear Jason

I am pleased to inform you that the EdD. Virtual Programme Research Ethics Committee (VPREC) has approved your application for ethical approval for your study. Details and conditions of the approval can be found below.

Sub-Committee:	EdD. Virtual Programme Research Ethics Committee (VPREC)
Review type:	Expedited
PI:	
School:	Lifelong Learning
Title:	
First Reviewer:	Kathleen Kelm
Second Reviewer:	Dr. Ewan Dow
Other members of the Committee	Dr. Baaska Anderson. Prof. Morag A. Gray in an observer mode

Date of Approval: 10th June 2014

The application was APPROVED subject to the following conditions:

Conditions

1	Mandatory	M: All serious adverse events must be reported to the VPREC within 24 hours of their occurrence, via the EdD Thesis Primary Supervisor.
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This approval applies for the duration of the research. If it is proposed to extend the duration of the study as specified in the application form, the Sub-Committee should be notified. If it is proposed to make an amendment to the research, you should notify the Sub-Committee by following the Notice of Amendment procedure outlined at <http://www.liv.ac.uk/media/livacuk/researchethics/notice%20of%20amendment.doc>.

Where your research includes elements that are not conducted in the UK, approval to proceed is further conditional upon a thorough risk assessment of the site and local permission to carry out the research, including, where such a body exists, local research ethics committee approval. No documentation of local permission is required (a) if the researcher will simply be asking organizations to distribute research invitations on the researcher's behalf, or (b) if the researcher is using only public means to identify/contact participants. When medical, educational, or business records are analysed or used to identify potential research participants, the site needs to explicitly approve access to data for research purposes (even if the researcher normally has access to that data to perform his or her job).

Please note that the approval to proceed depends also on research proposal approval.

Kind regards,

Morag Gray, Chair, EdD. VPREC

Kathleen Kelm, Chair during approval process since Prof. Gray is Second Supervisor.

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9/11/2014

University of Liverpool - Online Mail - Outcome of EdD. VPREC 10th September 2014



Jason Beckerman <jason.beckerman@online.liverpool.ac.uk>

Outcome of EdD. VPREC 10th September 2014

2 messages

Morag Gray <morag.gray@online.liverpool.ac.uk> Wed, Sep 10, 2014 at 5:17 PM
To: Jason Beckerman <jason.beckerman@online.liverpool.ac.uk>
Cc: "Kahn, Peter" <Peter.Kahn@liverpool.ac.uk>, "Qualter, Anne" <A.Qualter@liverpool.ac.uk>, Lucilla Crosta <Lucilla.crosta@my.ohcampus.com>

Dear Jason,

I am writing on behalf of Drs Anne Qualter and Lucilla Crosta, to inform you that your request for ethical permission in response to minor amendments planned for your previously approved study were granted at today's EdD. VPREC Committee.

I wish you continued success in your endeavours,

Morag

Chair, EdD. VPREC

Jason Beckerman <jason.beckerman@online.liverpool.ac.uk> Thu, Sep 11, 2014 at 6:43 PM
To: Morag Gray <morag.gray@online.liverpool.ac.uk>
Cc: "Kahn, Peter" <Peter.Kahn@liverpool.ac.uk>, "Qualter, Anne" <A.Qualter@liverpool.ac.uk>, Lucilla Crosta <Lucilla.crosta@my.ohcampus.com>

Thank you for the good news Morag. Is it the recommendation of the committee that I make the same amendment request to NYU Abu Dhabi's IRB? Thank you.

Regards,
Jason

[Quoted text hidden]

Appendix B: New York University Abu Dhabi IRB Approvals



26 June 2014

Jason Beckerman
New York University Abu Dhabi

Subject: Research protocol entitled "Student Learning Experiences in Regional Academic Travel at New York University Abu Dhabi", submitted for review on 17 June 2014

Dear Jason:

Please be advised that I have determined that the subject research protocol involving human subjects is exempt from IRB oversight under Categories 1 and 2. The level of risk is minimal and there is no continuing review required.

The decision extends only to the research protocol submitted and reviewed. In the event that you wish to make any changes to the protocol, the changes must be reviewed and approved by the NYUAD IRB in advance.

We thank you for your cooperation in helping the NYUAD IRB to protect human subjects in research.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to read "Steven D. Goode".

Steven Dale Goode
IRB Chair's Designee
NYUAD Institutional Review Board

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17 September 2014

Jason Seth Beckerman
New York University Abu Dhabi

Subject: Amendment - "*Student Learning Experiences in Regional Academic Travel at New York University Abu Dhabi*"

Approved Amendments:

The original design of the study included the distribution of a hypothetical scenario for students to review in advance of the interview. It was discussed with my thesis supervisor and determined that it would be best to distribute this hypothetical scenario during the interview. The reason for this change is that it was determined that distribution of the hypothetical scenario during the interview would more closely align the process with the standard reflective judgment interview. A secondary reason is to prevent any preparatory work students might do in advance of the interview with the hypothetical scenario. The goal of the reflective judgment interview is to gauge how well students are aware and able to understand how they come to learn what they learn, and how they use evidence and view sources of authority in their thinking. Finally, I will explicitly ask them permission to audio record the conversation. This change has also been added to the participant information sheet.

Date of IRB approval of amendment: 17 September 2014
Expiration of protocol: N/A

Dear Jason:

Please be advised that the New York University Abu Dhabi Institutional Review Board (NYUAD IRB) has unconditionally approved the amendments made to the subject research protocol through the expedited review procedure. No change in risk profile.

We thank you for your cooperation in helping the NYUAD IRB to protect human subjects in research.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tammy Aranki".

Sincerely,
Tammy Aranki
NYUAD Institutional Review Board Administrator and Chair's Designee

Appendix C: Participant Information Sheet



Participant Information Sheet

1. Title of Study

Student Learning Experiences in Regional Academic Travel at New York University Abu Dhabi

2. Version Number and Date

FINAL/20140905

3. Invitation

You are being invited to participate in a research study. Before you decide whether to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and feel free to ask for more information or if there is anything that you do not understand. It is important to note that participation in this study is voluntary and you should only agree to take part if you want to do so. This information is required to be provided to you before you undertake any involvement in this study.

Thank you for reading this.

4. Purpose of the Study

This study is being conducted to determine to what extent regional academic travel at New York University Abu Dhabi (NYUAD) represents a changed learning experience. The study is being conducted as part of a requirement for a thesis project conducted at the University of Liverpool. The objective of this study is to gather information through an interview process, the discussion of a hypothetical scenario, a subsequent analysis of interview responses against a theoretical framework, and recommendations for future programs offered by the Office of Global Education at NYUAD. Information provided for this study will be used for this sole purpose and will not be used for any other efforts such as promotional, marketing, or any other university purpose.

5. Why Have I Been Chosen to Take Part?

You have been identified as a student of NYUAD that has participated in a Global Education Regional Academic Travel experience. Participants have been identified based on an anonymised review of student reflections provided to the Office of Global Education. Reflections were reviewed anonymously by the

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Student Investigator, Jason Beckerman. Requests for names of students were made to the Office of Global Education. However, no information was provided to the Student Investigator linking specific reflections to specific students.

6.Do I have to Take Part?

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw at any time without explanation.

7.What Will Happen if I Take Part?

If you choose to be a part of this study, you will be asked questions related to your experience in regional academic travel at NYUAD, as well as possible follow-up questions in order to gain clarification. You will also be asked to consider a hypothetical scenario in the context of the research project.

The Student Investigator, Jason Seth Beckerman, will be conducting the interview alone. He is responsible for gathering information, asking questions, and analyzing the results in accordance with this study. Jason currently works at New York University Abu Dhabi Institute as Assistant Vice Provost of Institute Administration and Executive Education. There are no conflicts of interest as this research role is separate from Jason's professional role at NYUAD.

It is expected that interviews will last approximately 60 minutes. Interviews will either take place on NYU's Saadiyat Island campus, or via electronic audio/video conferencing.

You, the participant, will be present with Mr. Beckerman, either in-person in a private setting on the NYUAD campus, or via video conference, and will be asked a series of main questions with potential follow-up questions if necessary. During the interview, participants will be given a hypothetical scenario to review. After the review, participants will be asked questions related to the hypothetical scenario. This exercise will be a separate part of the interview from the main questions.

The interview will be audio recorded. Permission for audio recording will be requested at the start of the interview.

You, the participant, will be asked to sign a consent form and participant information sheet 5 days prior to the interview.

8.Expenses and/or payments

Participants will not be paid to participate in this study.

9.Are There Any Risks in Taking Part?

There are no perceived risks or disadvantages to participating in this study. If, however, you feel uncomfortable with any questions asked, or with any topic discussed, please bring this to the interviewer's attention immediately. Disclosure of information is entirely at the participant's discretion.

If your participation has caused any undue stress, please contact NYU's Wellness Exchange at +1 212 443 9999 or send an email to wellness.exchange@nyu.edu to reach a counselor. In addition, NYUAD has an on call counselor that can be reach at anytime by calling +971 (0) 56 685 8444.

10.Are There Any Benefits In Taking Part?

A potential benefit to participants is a greater self-awareness in how they approach their own learning. There is hope that information provided during the interviews will be used as part of the research study and will provide key information to further the research objectives, and to advise practices as part of the Office of Global Education for future regional academic trips.

11.What if I Am Unhappy or There Is a Problem?

If you are unhappy, or if there is a problem, please contact Jason Seth Beckerman, the Student Investigator at Jason.beckerman@nyu.edu, or if you prefer, Professor Peter Kahn at peter.kahn@liverpool.ac.uk, and we will try to help. If you remain unhappy or have a complaint which you feel you cannot come to us with then you should contact the Research Participant Advocate on +1 612 312 1210 or by email at (liverpooethics@ohcampus.com). When contacting the Research Participant Advocate, please provide details of the name or description of the study (so that it can be identified), the researcher(s) involved, and the details of the complaint you wish to make.

12.Will My Participation Be Kept Confidential?

Data will be collected through audio recording. A transcription of the data will be created using a third-party transcription service. The Student Investigator will seek written assurance that data sent for transcription will remain private and confidential. The data will then stored on the Student Investigator's password-protected computer. Data will then be analyzed and used to further the research objectives of the thesis project. Should you choose to remain anonymous, you may choose this option on the Consent Form provided. Your name will not be disclosed outside of the Student Investigator and the research supervisor for this project. After completion of the research, any data and recording will be archived for at least 5 years in a secured location, and by request, may be destroyed.

13. Will My Taking Part Be Covered By an Insurance Scheme?

Participants taking part in a University of Liverpool ethically approved study will have cover.

14. What Will Happen to the Results of This Study?

Results will be incorporated into the thesis project manuscript. You may request a copy of this study by contacting the Student Investigator.

You will not be identifiable from the results unless you have consented to do so.

15. What Will Happen If I Want to Stop Taking Part?

Participants can withdraw anytime without explanation. Results up to the period of withdrawal may be used if participants agree to this. Otherwise, participants may request that results be destroyed and no further use is made of them.

16. Who Can I Contact If I Have Further Questions?

Participants may contact Jason Seth Beckerman, Student Investigator, at Jason.beckerman@nyu.edu, or by calling +971504429512.

Appendix D: Research Consent Form



Committee on Research Ethics

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Title of Research Project: Student Learning Experiences in Regional Academic Travel at New York University Abu Dhabi

Researcher(s): Jason Seth Beckerman

Please
initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and have understood the information sheet dated 5 September 2014 for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information prior to my participation in the study, to ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason, without my rights being affected. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline.
3. I understand that, under the Data Protection Act, I can at any time ask for access to the information I provide and I can also request the destruction of that information if I wish.
4. I understand that confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained and it will not be possible to identify me in any publications.
5. I agree to take part in this study.

Participant Name

Date

Signature

Jason Seth Beckerman

Researcher

Date

Signature

Student Researcher:

Name Jason Seth Beckerman
Work Address PO Box 129188, Abu Dhabi, UAE
Work Telephone +971504429512
Work Email Jason.beckerman@nyu.edu

FINAL/20140905

Jason Seth Beckerman